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THE UK Comic Magazine

MAGIC & HORROR

ISSUE

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ISSUE



Welcome to ComicScene UK. We'd like to dedicate this Issue to all the great comic creators we lost this year. We've been sent some personal recollections of **John Armstrong** by Pat Mills and **Carlos Ezquerra** by Colin Noble.

See you next Issue.

Yours aye
Tony.

Carlos Ezquerra - A Tribute

Most of you who know me know of my love for D C Thomson comics. And some of that love is reserved for Carlos as I remember some of his earliest work in those comics before he was poached by the opposition. You will have seen other articles that have listed his bibliography in detail so I am going to concentrate on my few interactions with King Carlos.

In 2013, I found out that Carlos is going to be at Glasgow Comic Con. I was excited beyond words as this is a rarity for me to find out about a convention before it has happened, that is close enough for me to get to and has guests that I want to meet!

I missed out on getting a sketch in the morning session as Carlos started at 10:00 am and did not finish until well after 1:00 pm. Carlos apologised to those of us in the queue as he wanted to have his lunch and a cigarette before he did anything else. While many of us were mildly disappointed, we could happily wait, so I mooched around for a little bit more and then decided that I really had nothing more important to do than wait for Carlos as the panel he was involved in was a full house. I

settled in as being first in line for the next Carlos session and amused myself for the next 40 minutes or so reading comics. Carlos once again returned and was a bit shocked to see some people queuing already. He said that he wanted another cigarette and as an ex-smoker, I could easily sympathise with his need for another smoke. In fact, if I had not given up, I would have been joining him! I told him to go for his smoke as we would still be there when he got back.

Refreshed Carlos came back and thanked me for my patience. I demurred to him as I easily remembered what it was like to want a smoke and then he asked me a very important question. What did I want? My brain went into meltdown. I could have asked for Questor but I doubted that he would remember that. There was Judge Dredd or Johnny Alpha but I had seen everyone walking around the con with that one and some of those Carlos had gone through them very quickly as he could see the queue was getting longer all the time. I thought about Eve from Third World War, but then was I being too pretentious? Then it hit me, what was the one character that I went back to time after time? How about

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Major Eazy, I asked. Carlos almost does a double take and asks me am I old enough to remember him? If I had not loved him before then, I did with that comment. Carlos appears to be lost in thought for some time before he says Major Eazy? Yes I remember him. And that's it, Carlos is off.

The time passes and I am lost in watching Carlos creating something new. I got my sketch, I rambled on with my thanks and walked off in a bit of a daze. It was only when I checked my phone, I realised that I had monopolised his time for almost half an hour!

That was the only time I met Carlos, but after the con, I tentatively sent out a friend request on Facebook and was ecstatic when he accepted. A year or so passes and I pick up a batch of Wizards in a deal. So, I am flicking through them and I am stunned to find that I had forgotten almost all this early work of his. I sent a Private Message to Carlos asking him if he can recall his first work as I had ended up reading a story set during the Zulu Wars and this was published in 1973. Thinking this has to be one of his earliest, I write to him to ask about it and you can imagine how chuffed I am when he comes back to me to say that this was his first. So I created the post He Was

Only A Private Soldier on my blog and Carlos is kind enough to advertise it. Chatting with Alan Hebden since Carlos passed and it looks like Alan's father Eric Hebden was the author. We are checking on this and hope to get back to you all once we can confirm this.

He was due to return to the UK to an event that I could travel to in 2016 and I asked him about this a month or so before the event as I hoped to meet him again and confuse people by being in a queue for him with a pile of D C Thomson comics for him to sign. He had found the thought of it quite funny too to think that all these people would be lined up with 2000AD, Starlord, Just A Pilgrim and I would be there with a pile of Wizards for him to sign. However, due to the travel arrangements put in place by the organiser, he had told them of his disapproval and ended up not coming to that event. I missed out on meeting him and it is a regret I will have to the end of my days that I never got the pleasure of meeting Carlos again.

But we chatted off and on over the years. I won't flatter myself and say that I was a close friend of Carlos' but I was able to bask in the reflected glory of being a social media friend of his. His last cover came out in October and it is the variant cover of Snipe Elite: Resistance. However, I have to sign off with a final gift from Carlos. Carlos confirmed that this is his first piece ever published in British comics and this is either from Mirabelle or Valentine and he ended up with the gig when the script was sent to him by mistake. Mistakes like this we can live with. RIP Carlos, you will be missed.

Colin Noble.

John Armstrong - A Tribute

I was so sad to hear of John's recent passing. Many readers of girls comics will know of his legendary work on Bella at the Bar, the story of a working class gymnast for Tammy, and Moonchild, a Carrie-stye story published in Misty. Both serials were phenomenally popular. Bella, created by Jenny McDade, was so successful it even led to a series of Bella annuals.

He truly was the greatest girls comic artist of all time. He was the equivalent in importance of Brian Bolland and Simon Bisley in boys comics.

His work flourished in an era where girls comics were quite rightly outselling boys comics by two to one, because, after all, women have always read more than men. But then they were neglected. Sadly comics became an exclusive male sand-pit and girls comics died. And I guess John's importance and significance died with them.

His stories were always number one because he had a skill that is valued highly by girls and, hopefully, by a male audience, too. Namely he was a master of facial expression. Because he had astonishing insights into the female psyche. This is a genius talent that is barely recognized today but I have always valued and so did John's

readers. Whereas on a typical male comic, the characters might have a range of -say - 10 facial expressions for happy, sad, angry and determined, John would have 50! So his heroines could show a spectrum of feelings ranging from mild irritation to extreme anguish. The same range and complexity you would expect from a real life actor. So looking at his art is actually like watching tv. Only Joe Colquhoun on boys comics had a similar wide range. To me, conveying feelings is far more important and more meaningful than drawing big guns, amazing spaceships and peculiar men in tights. They are an exploration of inner space; of the soul itself.

I was truly privileged to work with John on Moonchild and also Grange Hill for the Beeb. He was also a smashing guy. I interviewed him at length some years ago and he told me some extraordinary stories about his life. For example, he was a Day Day plus One veteran. And he then served in the Far East after the Japanese surrender.

Like all really top professionals - he was 'low maintenance'. I would describe what I wanted in my scripts and he would get it instantly and just get on with it. I do miss those happy days when we worked together and I miss him, too, greatly.



So I'm delighted that Rebellion have reprinted his work on Bella and Moonchild and I hear he was thrilled to have his stories finally and rightly collected for posterity.

He needs to be remembered alongside all the other comic great artists and writers.

And it bears repeating: John Armstrong was the ultimate girls comic artist.

Pat Mills.



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The 13th Doctor

With Jodie Whittaker and her new friends having now made their small screen bow, it's all change not just on board the TARDIS but for Titan's Doctor Who comic book range as well with the debut this month of The Thirteenth Doctor's highly anticipated new monthly title. Written by Los Angeles-based scribe Jody Houser, some continuity will be provided by erstwhile Twelfth Doctor artist Rachael Stott.

"It was just a case of finding the perfect team for the book, and I'm so delighted

that it all came together," says Titan's Doctor Who line editor Andrew James. "We've obviously worked with Rachael extensively across the Doctor Who range, and if I'm honest, I was half-expecting that she'd have blasted off to titles new when I approached her about drawing this series. But I think Rachael must have Doctor Who metaphorically tattooed on the inside of every cell of her body, and it shows with every cover and page she delivers. She let me know that she was definitely up for coming back for

Jodie's Doctor, and she's having a blast, taking the show - and the book - into a brand new era. There are very few series in comics where everything refreshes so completely, while the core remains the same, so drawing The Twelfth Doctor Year Two is a very different proposition to drawing The Thirteenth Doctor #1."

Having made her name on Valiant's off-beat superhero book Faith, Houser has since left her mark at virtually all the major American comic book companies, penning Amazing Spider-Man: Renew

Your Vows at Marvel and DC's Batman spin-off Mother Panic in addition to Dark Horse's just-released Stranger Things mini-series.

"I've been a fan of Jody's writing, and had been looking for a project that she could possibly fit, for a long time, although you'll know from her many other titles at the moment that she can turn her hand to anything," says James. "We'd chatted a bit about the prospect of Doctor Who at last year's Thought Bubble in Leeds, and then many moons later, when it came to actually signing up the team, thankfully everything lined up. But of all the books Jody writes, Doctor Who is the one she was actually born for, and the fact that she'd been doing a live-play tabletop Doctor Who roleplaying game for years was just the icing on the cake. Of course, the fact that Jody had long wanted to work with Rachael, and vice versa, was an even better example of destiny in action."

With Comicraft's Sarah Jacobs in charge of lettering, Enrica Eren Angolini's colours further enhance Stott's impressive pen and ink work. "I've had the pleasure of working with Enrica on twelve issues of Titan's Warhammer 40,000 comic, where she conjured and rendered consistently amazing palettes over Tazio Bettini's art, and I'd also been able to see her developing her considerable talents on our just-released Shades of Magic: The Steel Prince mini-series," says James, referring to Titan's comic book spin-off of VE Schwab's fantasy novels, which are profiled elsewhere in this very issue of Comics Scene. "She and Tazio had helped out with a few Doctor Who pages here and there in the past, and I thought Enrica's colours would be the perfect fit for Rachael's clean lines."

With the new series receiving rave reviews on top of the highest viewing figures since Christopher Eccleston's inaugural appearance as the Ninth Doctor in 2005, it was important to ensure that the comic also lived up to the impressive example set by the new television show. "Titles like these are always a heady responsibility," admits James. "But then the same is equally true of any new #1, and particularly any new launch involving a brand new Doctor, as you never get a second chance to make a first impression. But with Jodie's casting, and also that of her new friends, coupled with the brand new production team, and not to mention the brilliant bench of TV writers and directors, it all adds up to an incredibly fresh, exciting and reinvented feeling,

which must be unique to Doctor Who amongst all the other long-running TV shows."

Consequently, all involved are determined to bring their A-game to The Thirteenth Doctor. "In this case, it's less the pressure, which is always there, and more a feeling of wanting to do the new era the justice it deserves," reasons James. "So as well as calling on some phenomenal creative talents, we've also gone out of our way to make the comics line as open and accessible as possible to fans both old and new."

But with new showrunner Chris Chibnall releasing little advance information about The Thirteenth Doctor and her new friends Yasmin Khan (Mandip Gill), Ryan Sinclair (Tosin Cole) and Graham O'Brien (Bradley Walsh), Houser and Stott didn't exactly have a huge amount of background material to draw on ahead of the first episode's transmission in early October. "It's been tricky on occasion as the secrecy on this new series has been phenomenal," says James, wryly. "I can only applaud that, as I can't believe that we headed into the new series with so much unspoiled, as that is such a rare thrill in this era of television. But for us, each and every new public-facing tidbit has been a help, because we got to see both how the characters have been presented internally within the BBC and in the documents that have been shared with us, but also how they had been presented to and then received by the viewers."

Noting that, "one of the best steers we've had is that this is still very much Doctor Who!" The BBC has given Titan plenty of guidance at every stage of the comic's production. "The core of the show - and the thrust of its stories - are just as they have always been up until now," explains James. "The Doctor Who storytelling engine is so strong, and so flexible, and the character of the Doctor themselves so universal and yet so specific at the same time, that it turns out that you can swap out pretty much all of its parts and it still runs like a dream. So picture an amazing episode of Doctor Who with this new cast at the helm, and that's what we're making in the comics."

Appearing in the recent Road to the Thirteenth Doctor three-parter, Houser and Stott also wrote and drew a trio of short stories, featuring the Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Doctors, that offered tantalising hints of what to expect from the new series. "The mysterious, time-trapped character that's was a part of all of the

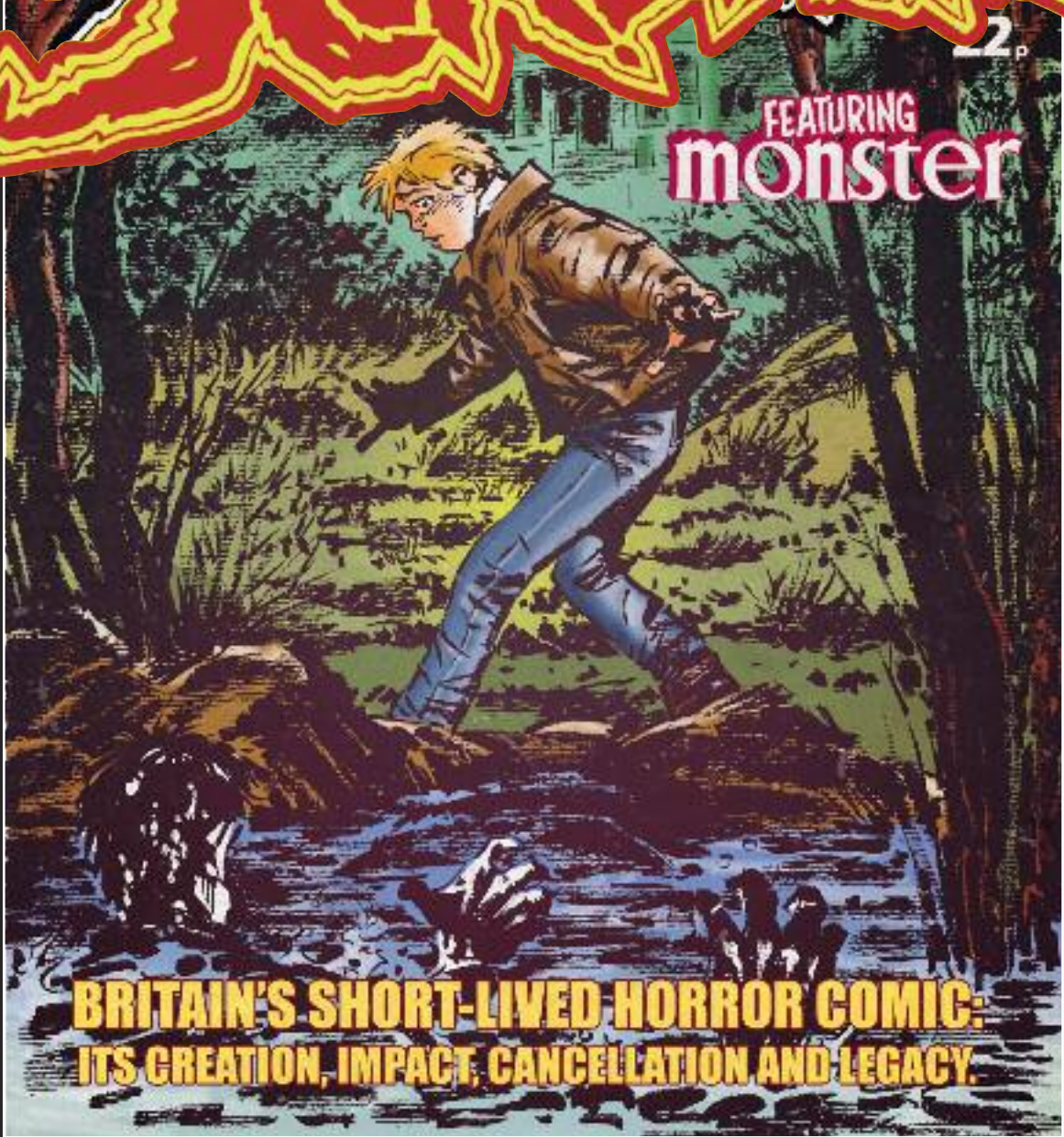
back-ups plays a major role in the first arc of the ongoing comic, so you won't have to wait long for that to be resolved," promises James. "Who they are, why they have been haunting the Doctor, and 'what if saving them is only the first part of the larger mystery?' are all at the core of Jody, Rachael and Enrica's first story. That said, if you're a new reader coming fresh to the first issue, we'll make sure that you're not lost. You'll get everything you need between those covers, so The Thirteenth Doctor #1 is a great place for any new, lapsed or curious readers to start picking up the comics."

Written by Richard Dinnick and illustrated by a host of different artists, the new series was preceded by a special zero issue, The Many Lives of Doctor Who, which saw Thirteen poignantly reliving all of her numerous past incarnations. "It has a couple of strong links into the ongoing series as it represents the regeneration scene as show on screen, but with a new context," teases James. "It also has Rachael and Enrica's first piece of Thirteenth Doctor interior art together, which is quite something. And each of the short stories also demonstrates some aspect of the Doctor's personality or toolset, whether it's the TARDIS, the sonic screwdriver, the Doctor's many friends from Earth, or their non-guns-blazing, heartfelt approach to problem solving. It's like a taster book for the whole Titan comics range, as much as it's a wonderful guide to the Whoniverse."

But with their Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Doctor monthlies having concluded for now, Titan will be concentrating on The Thirteenth Doctor for the foreseeable future. "The Thirteenth Doctor ongoing series is day zero for the next phase of the Doctor Who comics line, so we're going to keep the focus tight on that series through to the end of the year, and probably the start of 2019, too," says James. "We're committed to that core book, and also to not overwhelming the retailers and readers with too many spin-offs, as we get underway with this new phase of the Doctor's adventures. But as we all know, there's so much amazing stuff in the grand future history of Doctor Who that's worth exploring, so hopefully you'll see some new announcements early next year!"

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SCREAM!



IF YOU WANT TO GO FASTER!

If there was a UK version of the Comics Code Authority at the time, *Scream* would have never have passed first base. The first issue even featured a story by future American Comics Code baiter Alan Moore! You have to remember, this was a children's comic. This was a comic that got away with murder, for a short time anyway!



Horror comics in the UK were quite rare. In girl's comics we had great titles such as *Spellbound* and *Misty*. There was nothing really for male horror fans, except for *Dez Skinn's The House of Hammer* in the 1970's. So, when IPC management decided to launch a boy's horror comic in 1984, it was seen as a big risk. Video nasties were big news in the UK at the time, and IPC were still wary of getting bad press, after the Action comic banning in 1976.

The task of bringing this comic to fruition was given to Group Editor, Barrie Tomlinson, who then passed the dummy version of *Scream!* to new editor, Ian Rimmer. The Assistant Editor on the title was Simon Furman. I conducted an interview with Simon, who is better known these days as the co-creator of *Marvel's Death's Head* and the definitive writer on *Transformers* comics...

He says, "At the time, 1984, I was working for IPC Magazines in their Competitions Department, writing copy for a host of different titles, so moving onto *Scream* was a step sideways, and came with no long-term guarantees, but being a comics fan, I couldn't resist the chance to work on a weekly comic, especially one in the vein (no pun intended) of *2000 AD*, which was very much the punk rock of comics."

The team decided to go for a fictional editor, *Ghastly McNasty* (the name apparently coming from a band in Liverpool, who were called *Filthy McNasty!*). These fictional editors were a staple of British comics, which featured editors such as *Tharg*, *Starlord*, *Misty* and *The Big E*, who was actually *Dave Gibbons* in disguise. This fictional host harks back to EC Comics' *'Tales from the Crypt's'* *The Crypt Keeper*. In fact, the comic had a few similarities with its US predecessor, featuring an anthology format, and a sprinkling of 'one and done' stories, with a sting in the tale. So, in *Scream*, *McNasty* (not Scottish as far as I can ascertain!) was this mysterious hooded figure, who launched each issue 'from the depths' of IPC's *Kings Reach Tower*, in London. There was even a competition to draw what lay beneath his cowl!

Let's focus on the most popular strips over the comics initial run. *Scream!* was famous for the use of *2000 AD* stalwarts such as *John Wagner*, *Alan Grant*, *Cam Kennedy* and, in the first episode of *Monster*, *Alan Moore*. The first episode is a master-class in building mystery and suspense, and deftly introduces the main characters, except for the titular *Monster* character.

To say this first episode is dark is an understatement! It features mental and

physical abuse, extreme violence and, ultimately, murder and the disposal of a body! The climax to the first episode is such a good cliffhanger, that readers would not be able to help themselves coming back for more in the next issue... if you pardon the pun! However, *Moore*, and the artist *Heinzl*, would not return in the next issue. Due to other work commitments (so the official story goes), *Alan Moore* left the strip, after setting up the premise in the first issue. '*Rick Clark*' picked up the script-writing duties, yet another pen name for *John Wagner* and *Alan Grant*, of *Judge Dredd* fame. *Moore* had allegedly written a treatment for the whole story, which was at odds with the direction that the IPC





board wanted. The strip, once the Monster was revealed, (in reality, Kenny Corman's badly disfigured Uncle Terry.) became a 'Fugitive' style horror/thriller; it even featured a police pursuer, in the guise of Inspector Halley. Wagner and Grant were seen as a safe pair of hands, but the strip would not be without controversy. There was the problem of Uncle Terry 'accidentally' killing people along the way! In fact, he seemed to make a habit of this! Kenny and Terry left a trail of bodies in their wake over the initial run of issues!

There was also a problem with some of the physical violence depicted in the strip. An original page recently became available to buy on EBay. If you compare the page to the final printed version, you can see that the art has been changed quite significantly, to crudely erase the hand which is choking Kenny. This 'bodge' job is quite rough, as we can see by the quality of

the face in the final printed version. Also note the 'Next Week' panel has been changed from 'Double-barrelled trouble' to 'Monster Minder'. The board were obviously nervous.

Simon Furman recalls, "I quickly had to develop a whole different skill set and get used to weekly deadlines and constant revisions. IPC management were watching us like hawks, never really comfortable with the idea of a 'horror' comic for kids, even though I assume it was their idea in the first place. We had to continually self-censor the content, and even then, there were constant 'requests' for changes, to both story and art." Furman continues, "Two good things came out of that. One, I got to work with editor, Ian Rimmer, who taught me a lot and bore the brunt of the management stuff. That taught me patience, tolerance and how to work within constraints. We're still friends to this day.

Two, the constant deadline pressure, made worse by the last-minute changes, meant I got my first script work, doing last minute, often overnight fill-ins on *Terror of the Cats* and *The Dracula File*."

The Dracula File was a weird hybrid of hammer horror and espionage, set in the U.K. The script is unlike any other *Dracula* adaptation. It has a tone and eccentricity that can only be found in British comics. It was one of the more popular strips in *Scream*, with stunning black and white gothic artwork by Eric Bradbury. *The Thirteenth Floor* was a high concept story featuring a computer, Max, who utilises virtual reality for revenge against people who have wronged his tenants. The



punishment always fitted the crime! This strip written by Wagner and Grant again, under the guise of Ian Holland, was beautifully realised by Spanish artist Ortiz, who drew every episode and never missed a beat!

This strip featured many grisly deaths and the body count was high!

Unfortunately, Max had a habit of accidentally going too far and scaring the villains to death! Death by a Skeletal Grim Reapers, Spiders, Sharks and most bizarrely of all, psychotic Debt Collectors! Max would then have to hypnotise his human helper, Jerry, to help him cover up the murders... all this taking place in a kid's comic! And we are just scratching the surface. The first fifteen issues packed in vampires, zombies, gothic horror, body

horror, dark humour and killer cats!!!

The cancellation was not signposted. Usually, we got a 'Big News Inside for All Readers!' slogan on the cover, to signify an imminent merger into another comic, but this time, nothing. No new issue was forthcoming after number 15... we waited... and waited. Simon Furman picks up the story... "Scream only lasted 15 issues, the casualty of an NUJ (National Union of Journalists) strike - though in truth, management just grabbed the opportunity to shut us down without it looking like it was a management decision. But in that time, it taught me all my editorial skills and set me on the road to becoming a full-time freelance scriptwriter. I owe it, and Ian, a lot. Especially as Ian went to work for Marvel UK afterwards and kind of took me along with him."

Sadly, Scream was no more, but a merger did eventually happen, after a break, with the 1st of September issue of the Eagle. Strangely, only two stories carried over from Scream, Monster and The Thirteenth Floor. The Dracula File and the other continuing strips, were never completed.

The Dracula File's artist, Eric Bradbury did transfer over to the Eagle, and became the artist on Doomlord, another Wagner and Grant creation. The New Eagle and Scream! hybrid continued until the 30th of March 1985, with Monster completing its story arc in issue 158 and Uncle Terry settling in Australia, a happy ending of sorts!

The Thirteenth Floor moved away from its horror roots and Max was eventually moved into a department store where he starts working for MI5, as you do! Of course, his Thirteenth Floor still existed, in a changing room! The stories are still fun but do stretch credibility a bit! As if admitting a wrong turn, the writers eventually returned Max to Maxwell Tower, where he continued his reign of terror against any downbeat that terrorised his precious tenants.

A brief return to form follows, until the strip is finally put to bed in 1987, when the tower burns down and Max is shipped out. In a frankly bizarre turn of events, Max is installed as the new editor of the Eagle comic! Obviously, a homicidal computer is



the ideal candidate to run a kid's comic! Again, Max is added to the roster of British Comics fictional editors, although this one has blood on his hands!!! Max held onto the Editors role, until another new look sent Max to the great junkyard in the sky. Max did eventually get un-boxed last year in Rebellion's Scream and Misty Special, with more special issues planned.

Back to Scream, and the stories seemed to have lived on in British comics readers collective memory. With the recent acquisition of the old Fleetway characters by Rebellion, we are seeing collections of some of these fondly remembered stories, such as trades of Monster, The Dracula File and a new Thirteenth Floor collection.

To conclude, Scream pushed the boundaries of what is acceptable in children's comics in the 1980's. Much of the horror and violent content went under the radar of parents and the press. In many

ways the comic dodged the bullet but was eventually a victim of bad timing. Had the NUJ strike not happened, could Scream have survived, like its stable mate, 2000 AD?

We shall never know. But for a short while, Scream delivered stories which were indeed 'Not for the Nervous!'. Well, 'Not for the IPC board' anyway!

The last word goes to Simon Furman, "I look back on Scream with great affection, and don't wince too much when I re-read my stuff from back then. It was a steep learning curve but everything that followed rolled out of that time.

As a great writer once wrote, "it was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom."

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HORROR

in British Girls' Comics



From Old Nancy to the Crypt Keeper, host characters have been popular in the horror genre across media for the past 87 years. In American comics, EC's Ghoulunatics are perhaps the most famous examples. The Crypt Keeper, Vault Keeper and Old Witch were introduced in the 1950s; protecting readers from the horrifying stories they told with well-timed puns and irreverent greetings to their 'boils and ghouls'. They were followed by many others, including Warren Publishing's Uncle Creepy, Cousin Eerie, and Vampirella, and DC Comics' Cain and Abel in the 1960s, hosts of their House of Mystery and House of Secrets anthologies.

A less well-known fact is that many host characters also appear in British girls' comics between the 1950s and the 1990s. These spooky storytellers often curate a dedicated section of the comic telling horror or supernatural tales. Perhaps they were inspired by the American characters; but they also seem to grow naturally out of

the older British comics stories, which often began with a narrated paragraph of background, or an introduction from one of the characters.

The first and most famous British host is the Storyteller, introduced in the launch issue of the newly merged June and School Friend (30 January 1965). An older gent with a bow tie and pipe, he hosts 'The STRANGEST Stories Ever Told'. In his opening tale, 'The Haunted Bank' (artist Mike Hubbard), penniless Eric is tempted to steal from his job, but thinks better of it after some strange supernatural happenings. The Storyteller's main role is to introduce the stories and wrap them up with an explanation or a moral, although he occasionally also ends on a question, such as asking 'WAS it a dream?'

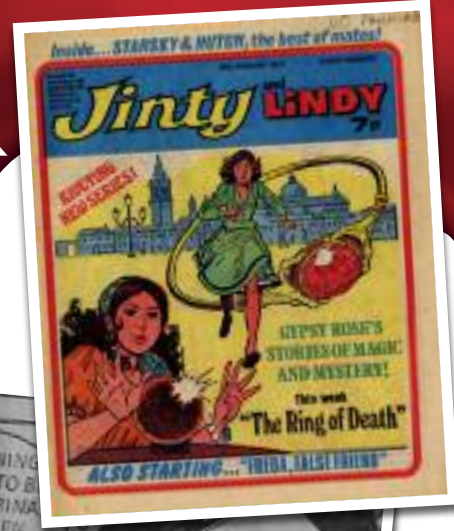
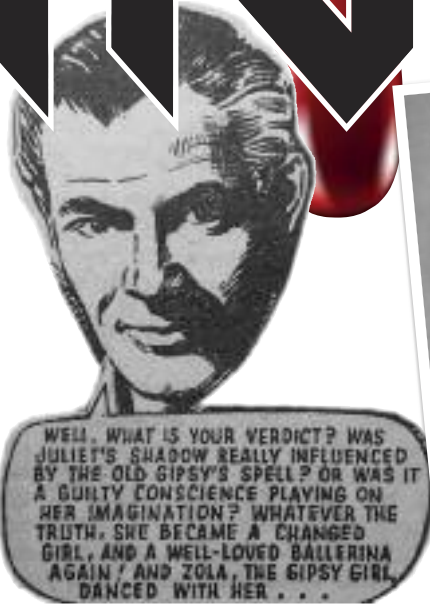
The next host is Diana's Man in Black, who debuts in 'Star of Doom' (Diana #197, 26 November 1966), a one-page 'tale[s] of mystery and horror'. Often drawn by David Cuzik Matysiak, he is a Dracula-esque character with black hair and Victorian outfit, who addresses the reader directly, inviting us to 'come a little closer' to hear his tale. Like the Storyteller he appears only in bookending panels and his comments

are mostly explanatory: wrapping up the tales rather than raising questions.

Other girls' comics also have older male characters as hosts. Spellbound (DC Thomson, 1976-78) was the home of Damian Darke: a tall, older man in period dress (high collar, ruffled shirt front) and with a raven on his shoulder. He appears weekly from the first issue, where he introduces 'Spectre from the Flame', in which a ghostly judge saves protagonist Jane from an intruder. His epilogues are mixed: sometimes summarising, or sometimes raising questions by asking, for example, 'Well, what do you think?'

These patriarchal guides are followed by some more diverse hosts. 'Gipsy Rosa Remembers' appears in Diana for a time, and the Judy annuals occasionally feature 'She of the Shadows': a glamorous veiled lady in long black dress and gold jewellery. As she introduces herself in the 1976 annual: 'I am She of the Shadows. I know many things and have strange stories to tell. Come closer and listen to one of them.' Like Damian Darke, she combines explanations with questions, offering closure that is tinged with ambivalence by inviting the reader to question the story outcomes.

HOSTS



Judy's most famous host character is Bones, a skeleton who presents 'Tales from Skeleton Corner'. This 'nerve tingling new series' launches with 'Flower Power' (#1632, 20 April 1991), in which Carly uses a homemade flower lotion on her face but is horrified when later her skin withers like dead flowers. Unlike the other male hosts, Bones is more EC Comics than paternal storyteller, and often matches his jokes and appearance to the tale. Skeleton Corner survives the merger of Judy and Mandy (forming M&J, 1991-97) and Bones continues to appear in intermittent runs between 1991-1995.

Gypsy Rose first appears in Jinty and Lindy in 1977 in 'The Ring of Death' (29 January 1977), becoming the host of 'Gypsy Rose's Tales of Mystery and Magic'. She breaks with the previous dominant type of host by being young and female, and also by participating in her own tales (although later stories reduce her to a bookending role), where she helps characters with hauntings, magical items, or other mysteries. For example, in her first appearance she helps Gina discover

poison hidden in a family heirloom.

When Misty was launched in 1978, a male storyteller ('Nathan somebody') was initially proposed by sub-editor Bill Harrington, but was rejected as 'too creepy'. Instead its first editor Wilf Prigmore devised Misty: a seductive, ethereal host character (drawn by Shirley Bellwood), who also acted as cover girl and fictional editor of the entire comic. Misty welcomed readers to each issue, answered letters, and occasionally bookended stories in the annuals and holiday specials, where she often cast doubt on the story's outcome.

As well as this type of liminal host (situated outside the storyworld), many serials had their own dedicated hosts: confined to one setting, but introducing a new tale or adventure each week. One of the first is Jackie Flynn, the narrator of 'Bridget at War', who first appears in Diana #146 (4 December 1965) and bookends all ten episodes of this serial. Other later examples in the 1970s and 1980s include 'Madame Marlova Remembers' in which

Madame instructs her pupils with inspirational stories of famous ballerinas (Debbie), Miss Hatherleigh the caretaker of 'Cremond Castle' (Spellbound, Nikki), Megan Dolwyn who tells customers the histories of her dolls in 'Dolwyn's Dolls' (Bunty), Tamsin Treco's grandmother in 'A Tale from the Toy Museum' (Bunty), Beverley Jackson who knows the story behind every button in 'The Button Box' (Tammy), and Jade Jenkins' bring-and-buy stall which is made up of objects that all have stories to tell (M&J).

As recurring characters, the girls' comics' hosts helped to shape the distinct identity of each publication. Their roles varied and they might explain, question, console, amuse or intrigue. Nonetheless, they were well loved and are remembered to this day.

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The Gothic Art of Eric Bradbury



Eric Bradbury (1921 - 2001) was one of the unsung heroes of British adventure comics. My first encounter with his art was in IPC's *Scream!* in 1984, where he worked on *The Dracula File*, written by Gerry-Finlay-Day and latterly Simon Furman. As a result of the *Eagle/Scream!* Merger, Eric ended up as the artist on fan favourite *Doomlord*, where his dark and inky art style was a perfect match for the slightly bonkers direction Alan Grant took the strip. More on this later.

Bradbury studied at Beckenham art school, before going on to work for the Gaumont-British Animation company. Around 1949 he started working for Amalgamated Press which became Fleetway and eventually IPC. One of his fondly remembered strips was *Mytek the Mighty*, for Valiant. The strip, which was written by regular collaborator, Tom Tully told the rather odd story of a giant robotic ape!

The art is distinctively Bradbury, with great use of black and white in the page compositions, and even the human characters have an 'ugly' feel about them. Another Valiant strip closely associated with Bradbury was *The House of Dolmann*.

A truly bonkers creation (Valiant seemed to have a monopoly on these high concept strips at the time!) this story featured the titular character's puppet army of mechanical warriors, which he used to fight crime! Again, Eric's ability to draw anything made him the perfect choice of artist on this strip.

In 1969, Bradbury moved onto *Smash*, where he became one of the artists on *Cursitor Doom*, which was written by British comics stalwart, Scott Goodall. This strip tapped into Eric's ease with horror and the supernatural. Every panel of this seeps of rich detail, and no shortcuts were taken in this depiction of a paranormal

investigator! Some other notable strips that he worked on are *Danny Doom* for Valiant/Lion (1974), the story of the world's greatest magician (beat that *Dynamo!*) and *Screaming Skulls/The Terror in the Fog* for The Valiant Book of Mystery and Magic (1976), a one-off annual which unusually credited the writers and artists, preceding 2000AD's credit cards by a number of years.

In 1978, Eric moved over to Battle Picture Weekly, working on strips such as *Joe Two Beans* (written by John Wagner) and *Death Squad* (written by Alan Hebden), just to prove there was nothing this artist could not turn his hand to! Around 1981, he started to occasionally contribute to 2000AD, mostly *Future Shocks* (including one written by Alan Moore, "The Big Clock!" in 2000 AD Prog 315) and various *Tharg The Mighty* one-offs, where he would often depict many of his writing collaborators as droids and drew many a *Thrill-Sucker* over the years!

This takes us up to 1984, when he started work on The Dracula File. This rather bizarre cold war take on Dracula was again a perfect opportunity for Bradbury to flex his gothic skills! The script is to commended for trying to do something new with the Dracula franchise, but it is the artwork which really makes this strip so popular. Unfortunately, the strip was never completed, a victim of the sudden cancellation of *Scream!* due to strike action at IPC. When *Scream!* reared its horrific head again, it was shunted into the *New Eagle*, issue 128. Rather oddly, considering its popularity, *The Dracula File* did not make the cut. Instead, in a rather ingenious move, Eric Bradbury took over *Doomlord* from Heinz! (in reality Alberto Giolotti's studio).

Eric's art was a breath of fresh air for the strip, he quickly established himself and went on to work on this for the next 5 years! An impressive feat! During this time, he illustrated a sequel (of sorts) to the first *Doomlord* photo story, featuring the return of evil *Servitor Zyn*, and perhaps the greatest Alan Grant invention on the strip, illustrated the story of *Enok*, *Doomlord Vek's* wayward son! The *Enok* plot ran for years, with him starting out as evil, but being 'reborn' as the saviour of mankind!

During this run, you can see the neo-gothic architectural influence apparent in the design work of environments, such as *Doomlord's* *Isolarium* on the dark side of the moon. Grant would play up to Bradbury's strengths, and the stories became darker and darker. A notable entry into the canon, is a sideways diversion into

a parallel universe, where an unchecked *Enok* has enslaved the world! Great stuff!

However, all good things come to an end. *Vek* is turned into a villain, and it is up to *Enok* to save the day. The strip really starts to push the boundaries on what you could depict in a children's comic at this time. However, Eric's commitment to the strip remained un-wavered, and the latter days of the strip feature some of his best work, with some stunning composition and creative page layouts. The scripts, latterly became obsessed with death and rebirth, and when the plug was pulled, it came about very swiftly. The conclusion to the story was very rushed, and ultimately wound up with a very ambiguous and bizarre open-ending. Alan Grant told me recently he would have kept writing *Doomlord* forever if he could! Time for a revamp perhaps?

Eric Bradbury went onto illustrate *Loner* for the merged *Eagle/Wildcat* era, and did some other strips, including a story called *Beast!* with Tom Tully, but these stories never achieved the popularity of his run on *Doomlord*. He sadly passed away in 2001. His legacy lives on, and this prolific artist can be appreciated by a whole new generation of comics fans in reprints of his work, such as *The Dracula File* and *Von Hoffman's Invasion* both published by *Treasury of British Comics/Rebellion*. Now, if only we could get a reprint of Bradbury's *Doomlord* run...

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Sandman

Simon Spurrier

Like many other comic book creators before and after him, Simon Spurrier's first formative comic book experience in the early 1990s arrived when he discovered Neil Gaiman's Sandman. Now the Kent-based scribe is one of four writers who are helming the quartet of titles that make up Vertigo's new Sandman Universe line.

"I don't know any comics writer, certainly in British comics, who wasn't a massive fan of Sandman," he reflects. "Speaking for myself, I didn't really pick up anything that you might think of as a comic until I was about sixteen/ seventeen, and when I did it was exclusively Vertigo fare for the first couple of years of my comics reading, so Sandman meant a great deal to me."

After Spurrier was initially approached by then-Vertigo executive editor Shelly Bond about Sandman Universe a couple of years ago, he took the opportunity to re-read the 75-issue series, which ran from January 1989 to March 1996. "I realised how much I'd missed and how much of it had kind of cruised past me in this - no pun intended - dream of tone and atmosphere rather than plot," he continues. "There was actually a huge amount of plot in there, which I hadn't necessarily clung onto, so I got a lot more out of it the second time around, and it was more than enough to make me wildly excited about picking up and playing with some of these toys."

While Dan Watters is penning Lucifer for artists Max and Sebastian Fiumara, Kat Howard and Tom Fowler are teaming up on Tim Hunter's adventures in The Books of Magic and Nalo Hopkinson and Dominike Stanton are collaborating on House of Whispers, Spurrier and former Wonder Woman artist Bilquis Evely are taking charge of what is arguably the Sandman Universe's core title in The Dreaming. Spinning out of August's one-off Sandman Universe #1, it finds Daniel - who took over from Morpheus as the Lord of the Dreaming at the conclusion of the original series - is missing in action, leaving a gaping hole in the otherworldly dimension.

"The big takeaway from the special is that whereas Dream, the Lord of the Dreaming, has gone AWOL before and nobody has batted an eyelid when he'd gone on one of his little jaunts, this time it appears that he's not coming back," explains Spurrier "Not because he's been captured in the same way that Sandman started but because he doesn't want to come back. That has ramifications for all the characters in all four of the books."

With Spurrier describing his role on the special as "coming up with the connective tissue that allowed us to jump around the world or worlds in order to meet each of these characters," the reader's entry point into Sandman's mythical kingdom is Matthew the Raven, who is, of course, the reincarnated form of Matthew Cable, the first husband of Swamp Thing's wife Abby Holland, who had originally met a grisly end of her malevolent father Anton Arcane before being resurrected by Dream.

"The simplistic way to look at the special is that it's Matthew flying around looking for Dream while crisscrossing the stories of these other interesting characters as he goes, which serve as an introduction to them," says Spurrier. "It was a way of showing off all the different artists who are involved as well as introducing various worlds and bringing to the readers' attention characters old and new, who will be featuring in all of these stories. Most of all, it's a way of saying 'here is our starting point and everything's gone horribly wrong, so let's see what happens next...'

However, Spurrier isn't sure whether Daniel being taken off the board - at least for now - has made his task on The Dreaming easier or harder. "It's kind of half and half, as it's not the case that we're ruling out using Dream as a character but his conspicuous absence is the driving force of my book," he reasons. "It's also not that we're ignoring him, it's more 'let's go find this guy' or 'why is he not here?' and 'what should we do because he's not here?' That said, if I had gone straight into it with him as the main character or even

one of the characters, it would have been extremely daunting. If you tell a story about a place like this, it's always going to end up being an ensemble piece but if that place is manifested in one character then it becomes quite difficult to introduce concepts and very personal stakes for these characters, as Dream can just snap his fingers and nothing changes as everything is set. So it made sense as a starting point to focus on his creations rather than the creator himself and that's something that I get very excited about."

Having started out on 2000 AD in the early 2000s scripting series like Bec and Kawl, Lobster Random, The Simping Detective and Judge Dredd, Spurrier has since balanced stints on work-for-hire titles like X-Men: Legacy with creator-owned series like Image's Gutsville, Cry Havoc and Angelic. Potentially the best of both worlds, The Dreaming explores similar subject matter as some of his previous work.

"There's some weird stuff going on as at the same as doing The Dreaming, I've been working on Labyrinth: Coronation," he says, referring to Boom! Studio/ Archaia's prequel to the Jim Henson-directed 1986 musical fantasy, which starred David Bowie as the Goblin King, Jareth. "It's not that they're connected in any tonal way to any extent, but they're both about realms of the subconscious, and I find that the same sorts of strange things are hitting me thematically about halfway through writing them. There's also a lot of character-led stuff about the responsibility of the creator for their creation, and religious themes and iconographies, and the idea of ideas and the story of stories. All those things that I've spent years and years building books around, and suddenly it's all here, and I'm getting to the bedrock. You can't dig much deeper than setting a story in a literal shared mass mind of the human race, so it's a kind of a distillation of an awful lot of stuff that I've been fascinated with for years."

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THE BOOKS OF MAGIC:

A Tour of the SUPERNATURAL CORNERS of the DC Universe

Published in 1990, "The Books Of Magic" was a proto Vertigo DC prestige format (heavy stock perfect bound) 4 issue mini series, introducing the 12 year old Timothy Hunter destined to be a great sorcerer and either save the world, or enslave it.

Bespectacled, skate boarding, magically talented, pre-pubescent have had a high profile over the last 20 years. However, Neil Gaiman's Master Hunter was published a full 7 years before JK Rowling's Master Potter and don't mention 2000ADs "Luke Kirby".

Tim is approached by the "Trenchcoat Brigade" of four of the DC Universe's magical characters, The Phantom Stranger, Dr. Occult, John Constantine and Mr. E and they take it in turns to escort him around the DC universe's, past present and future, consider it the DC universe's "A Christmas Carol". Chasing skateboarding Tim around London, they corner the most pubescent 12 year old ever, and convince him to explore his heritage.



In Book 1, beautifully drawn by John Bolton, the Phantom Stranger is the DC Universe's go to character for explaining portentous, supernatural and biblical events, showing up whenever there is a significant supernatural event. The Stranger takes Tim back to the birth of creation, through the great civilisations, with cameos by historical and mythical characters, both from the real universe and its DC counterpart to the characters created in the first years of what became the DC Universe.

Returning Tim to the present day, the Stranger passes Tim to John Constantine for the Scott Hampton drawn tour of the (then) present day DC universe of Book 2. Riding the "synchronicity highway" Tim witnesses the supernatural and magical forces that co exist with normal people and the superhero brigade, Baron Winter, Zatanna, Madame Xanadu and the Spectre, with the ever present threat of the forces of evil to dispatch or turn him to their cause, but always under the ever watchful eye of a body hopping Deadman, Boston Brand.



For the third leg drawn by Charles Vess, (with some help from John Ridgway) Dr. Occult (created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster) takes Tim on a tour of Faerie, or at least Gaiman's interpretation of Faerie. Dr. Occult and his female counterpart show Tim the wonders and terrors of Faerie, and Gaiman gets to throw in some mythical, fairytale and anthropomorphic characters, including some quite dark humour. Dr. Occult's duty ends with a whistle stop tour of DC fantasy worlds, including tours of Skartaris, Gemworld and Hell, and of course almost inevitably, the Dreaming.

In the finale, painted by Paul Johnson (whatever happened to him?), Tim is taken on a journey through to the far future by the blind and fanatical "Mr. E" (ahem). On the way, Tim sees one of his possible futures, presented to him as a lesson by E. Tim and Mr. E travel on, meeting the future selves of Earth's magical heroes, New Gods, to a time where science and magic become indistinguishable and finally to the end of the universe, where the time travellers meet two very familiar and familial beings there to "shut up shop" and E takes steps to prevent what he sees as the inevitable consequence of Tim taking the first steps into the world of magic.

Gaiman was already firmly ensconced within the spooky end of the pre Vertigo DC universe when "The Books of Magic" was released, "Black Orchid" had been published and "The Sandman" hadn't long begun, it's of the same ilk as the latter and there are close ties to the world of the Dreaming. Although "The Books of Magic" was ostensibly a young adult fiction story about a child magician, it was also a tour of the supernatural and fantasy corners of the DC universe, a magical A-Z of the DC universe at the beginning of the nineties. It's impressive how Gaiman and co cram in hundreds of DC characters and references to the events in the DC universe. Some may only be clear to the most ardent DC fan, whilst some characters are strangers to the DCU, notably a fancily dressed bear from Nutwood.

Though collected under the Vertigo banner, there is nothing particularly "mature", there is no bad language, extreme violence or nudity. The interactions between Tim and Constantine are particularly endearing and it's a shame that Gaiman had few stories printed involving the "Hellblazer" star. Gaiman

successfully brings a sense of wonder and the artists are ideally suited to the subject matter. Bolton's atmospheric magnificence in the early years of the DCU, Vess's ethereal rendering of Faerie, Tim and Constantine's grubby, smokey US odyssey courtesy of Scott Hampton and finally Johnson's jagged and clinical lines depicting the far future, even if Tim occasionally looks more 16 than 12.

Following the launch of Vertigo in 1993, Tim was an obvious candidate to star in an ongoing series. Consequently a number of series under the "Books of Magic" title, variations, or simply entitled "Hunter" were published throughout the nineties and early noughties, with varying levels of success and with another relaunch on the horizon. Tim has certainly not replicated the impact that Master Potter had on the world. Perhaps it's because in the original series Tim was basically the plot device and reader identification figure for what was essentially a guided tour of the magical and fantasy corners of the DC Universe.

That's not to negate what is a classic series, well scripted and warrants re reading to linger over the stunning art and spotting the hidden references and cameos and, however it fits into the current version, a beautiful primer to the spooky end of the DCU.



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SHADES OF MAGIC



One of Titan Books's bestselling series, Victoria 'VE' Schwab's Shades of Magic has now made the transition to comics in a new mini-series written by the author herself and drawn by Andrea Olimpieri. Published between 2015 and 2017, the original trilogy of Shades of Magic, A Gathering of Shadows and A Conjuring of Light take place between various different parallel Londons, which each have their own particular attitude towards magic, ranging from vibrant Red London where the arcane arts are embraced in all their colourful glory to the dreaded Black London, where no one dare speak its name. Set thirty years before the start of the first novel, the four-part Shades of Magic: The Steel Prince explores the younger years of one of Red London's most controversial figures, the now-King Maxim Maresh.

"With every series, there are stories that get prioritised, and invariably a few that get left behind, or only hinted at, in the interests of keeping the focus and momentum, and Maxim's backstory was one of those," says Schwab. "I have Threads of Power, the new novel series coming up in 2020, which will continue to move forward in this world. But

when Titan offered me the chance to write a comic, I knew I wanted to dive into Maxim's past, and to look back at when he first made his name as the Steel Prince."

Exiled by his father to some war-ravaged far-flung lands in order to cut his military teeth, The Steel Prince occurs at a time when the youthful Crown Prince is still finding his way in life. "I wanted to look at who Maxim was as a young man, as well as the people and events that informed and defined him when he was Prince Rhy's age," continues Schwab, referring to Maxim's own son and heir apparent to the throne of Arnes, the capital of Red London. "In the books, he's a character who seems very set in his ways, and he's judged for that. But we're all a product of our youth, and our development, and I wanted to dive deeper into his younger years. I also wanted an excuse to take the readers to Verose, which is nicknamed the Blood Coast, which is a place with its fair share of secrets."

Those familiar with the books can also expect to encounter a few if not many familiar faces. "Readers will get a glimpse of Tieren, but most of the characters in this series are new," explains Schwab, alluding

to the head priest of Red London's Sanctuary. "Perhaps the most important, and one only briefly mentioned in A Conjuring of Light is Isra, Maxim's de facto partner-in-crime during this time."

Hailing from Nashville but now based in Edinburgh, Schwab is an enthusiastic reader of comics, ranging from "mainstream Marvel and DC" to Image series like Kieron Gillen and Jamie McKelvie's The Wicked + the Divine and Marjorie Liu and Sana Takeda's Monstress. "Shades of Magic was influenced most of all by Harry Potter and (manga series) Avatar: The Last Airbender and Full Metal Alchemist," she says. "And I'm constantly looking to fill the creative well with new work."

Beginning with Ben Aaronovitch popular Rivers of London - which has now spawned six successful mini-series including 2015's inaugural Body Work and this year's Water Weed - Shades of Magic is the latest Titan Books property to make the jump from prose to the comic book page. Last year, Kim Newman teamed up with artist Paul McCaffrey Anno Dracula: 1895 - Six Days of Mayhem, while the first issue of George Mann and Dan Boulwood's Newbury &



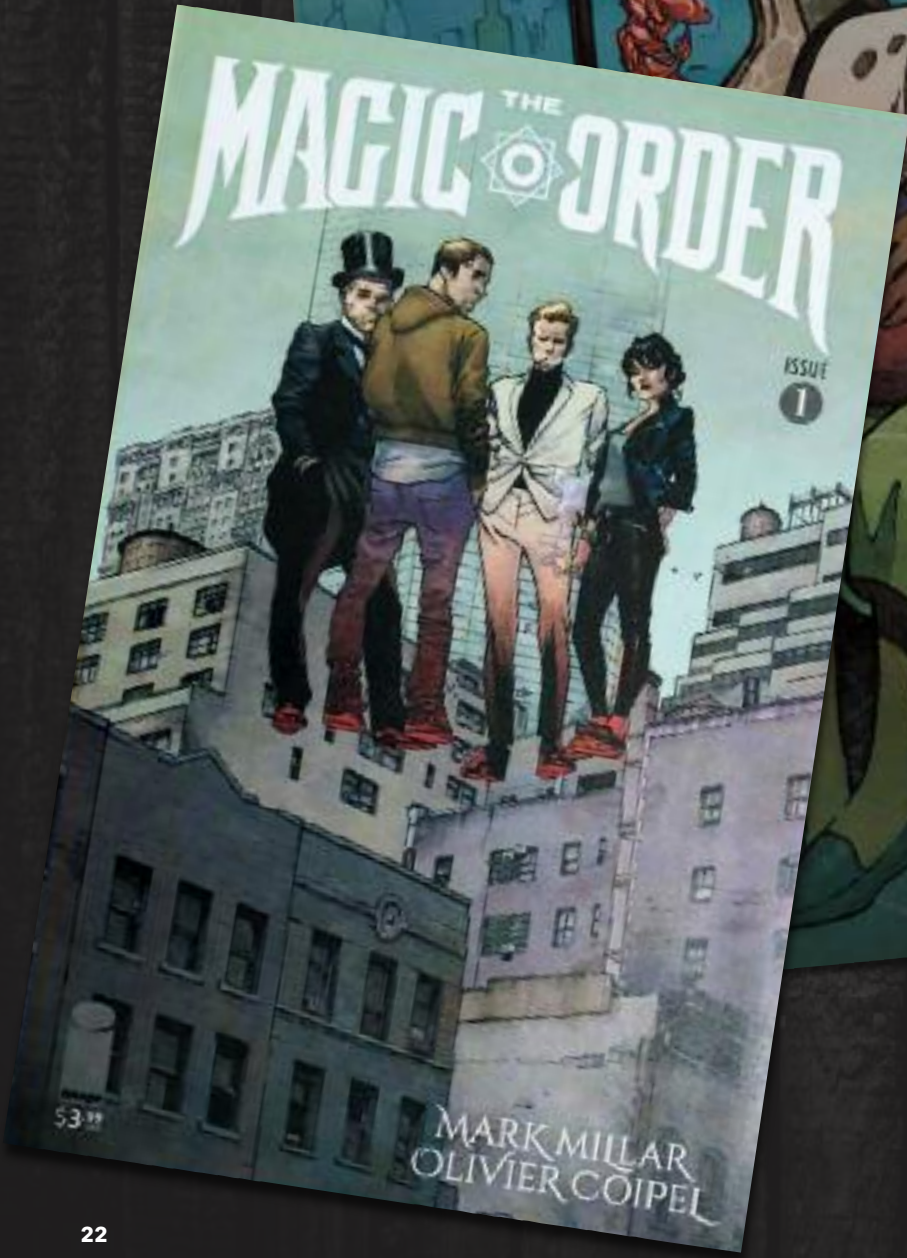
Hobbes was published only a month before *The Steel Prince's* debut issue.

As a newcomer to at least working in the comic book medium, Schwab has relished the opportunity to bring her fantastical world - and the equally colourful characters that inhabit it - to glorious full-colour life. "That can also be a potential disadvantage I suppose, since giving things an actual shape influences the extent to which people are able to imagine for themselves," she reasons. "Comics certainly become a more collaborative process a lot sooner as whereas writing the first draft of a novel is a solitary experience, writing a comic involves a pretty constant stream of

communication. I also love that I am getting to know my artists better and better with each issue, and can really lean into their strengths."

Noting that, "my work is in such good hands," Schwab has enjoyed working with Italian artist Andrea Olimpieri (Titan Comics' *Dishonoured*) and colourist Enrica Angiolini. "It's been amazing," she says. "I've mentioned the dangers of articulating what a fictional world likes, but I will say that the version Andrea and Enrica have brought to life is the closest to my vision as possible. They've done an incredible job."

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“Millar took a very
he created the wo

Mark Millar is one of modern comics' most successful writers. After a number of years spent working for 2000AD, Marvel and DC, for a number of years now, he has been writing his own creator-owned material. Millar has seen many of his co-creations like Kick-Ass and Kingsman turned into successful films. This year saw him sell many of his comic properties to Netflix and **The Magic Order** is just the first series to spring from this deal. Joel Meadows took a look at the genesis of this comic...

Mark Millar is a writer who has written a lot of different genres and in an interview back in May this year with CBR, he explained what The Magic Order is.

"I love jumping around genres. Civil War and Kick - Ass are super heroes. Kingsman is spies. Chrononauts is sci-fi. Reborn fantasy. This is my magic project. I hesitate to say horror because it's not got that sudden fright or gore tropes in the comic or our eventual show. It's more like for the kids who enjoyed something like Harry Potter or that kind of genre growing up now having something that appeals to their adult sensibilities.

Tonally, it's actually closer to The Sopranos in that it's about a patriarch in an underworld family and his concerns about his children. King Lear is the basic structure, if that doesn't sound too pompous, but with magic wands. And it's dirty. It opens with a shagging scene, so you immediately know this isn't Hogwarts."

Last year, the writer went into a little extra detail about his mindset about the series in an interview he did with EW:

"I'm a great fan of grounding big concepts so everybody gets them. My hero Richard Donner does this so brilliantly, giving us huge things like the Book of Revelation or Superman, but setting them in a world that looks like the one outside our window. My other hero Stan Lee is amazing at this too. He takes characters as weird as Spider-Man or Thor and comes in through the human angle, making these things about teen angst or two brothers who don't get on. Something a mainstream audience can really connect with. Fantasy I think can be off-putting for people because it's often missing a human angle, a realistic hook that makes it open to anyone. So my idea with The Magic Order was to take

something that's essentially about a secret order of good wizards who got rid of all the bad things hundreds of years ago, but live quietly among us now with blue-collar jobs and ordinary domestic lives. It's all about accessibility, and the big idea here is that these are the guys who keep the world as rational and normal as it feels to us now."

Millar took a very particular approach when he created the world of the Magic Order, he explained in the same chat he did with CBR online:

"Traditionally, there's a Neo or a Luke Skywalker when you're having a new world explained to you, someone you identify with and whose journey you can relate to. This is a little different because it starts when we're already deep into it. The idea is that all those myths and monsters we heard about as kids were real, but they were pushed back into the darkness a thousand years ago. Now we've cemented over all the madness with cities and we live these lovely peaceful lives where nobody's ever really seen a ghost, and these guys are the reason why. They do day jobs just like we do, but when there's a problem they're called together to take care of it. We've got three leads, the three children of the man who runs the Magic Order, and the one we identify most with I guess is the guy who's turned his back on it and become a complete norm. He and his wife are just living a regular life for a very big reason we find out about in the first issue."

The deal with Netflix gives him a lot of latitude as a creator. He chatted with SyFyWire this summer about how it all works.

"Because I'm now on staff at Netflix as an executive, so what happens is, I create seven projects a year for them; that's my

deal. Three or four of them each year I'm going to turn into comics. And that's just because I love comics. The Netflix people actually see the value in the comics as well. A lot of them love comic books and they told me, "Hey, it would be really cool if you did some of these projects as comics." So the process is, I create everything I'm doing at Netflix as a movie or television show, but we will also do comics for maybe half of them. I just like having something on my shelf. I'm a comic guy above everything. The idea of not doing comics for even a year would be horrible to me.

So this is the best of both worlds. And Netflix has given me the budget to get anyone from Marvel and DC that I want, which is great. Another benefit to this deal is through Netflix, I have new ways of promoting comics. That has basically been the same my entire life. Comic stores have always been there, the industry has the same distributors, nothing's really changed. The first time I walked into a comics store was when I was 12 years old, and I'm now in my 40s, and it's still basically the same. Things haven't changed at all. But Netflix, they have lots of clever people there and they have great ideas. The Magic Order is the first bet, and they're trying out new things in terms of producing comics and promoting them," he explained.

2018 has marked a new stage in Millar's career but he certainly doesn't seem to be resting on his laurels. The Magic Order is the first but it certainly won't be the last new Millar comic creation readers can expect to see over the next few years.

Issue #5 of The Magic Order came out in October

particular approach when
world of the **Magic Order**"

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THE

NIGHTSHIFT



If horror comics have to chill the blood to qualify for the label, then Dan Brereton's Nocturnals stories might not count. They do have reanimated corpses, vengeful wraiths, monstrous cephalopods from the ocean depths, apocalyptic warnings of doom, and sorcerous old crones trying to cook young girls in cauldrons on Halloween. But they also have outcasts finding peace, orphans finding their parents, and old Mafiosi finding the better angels of their nature. They have heart. And they have a singular artistic style, the vividly colourful painting technique that Brereton has been honing since the Nocturnals crew first arrived in comics more than twenty years ago.

That was in *Black Planet*, a 1995 mini-series from Malibu's creator-owned Bravura imprint which in good Shakespearean style keeps the saga's eventual protagonists off-stage for a while. It starts instead with a confrontation in the sewers, between a sympathetic reptile-man named Komodo and the gun-toting enforcers of the Narn K organisation, which is apparently busy creating monsters. No one involved is remotely human, but the sewer setting is on loan from *The Third Man*, the bad guys wear the coats and hats of 1940s heavies with flinty dialogue to match, and Brereton's plan to splice characters from supernatural horror into the settings of film noir is in place already.

Human beings do turn up later, as the story spreads out across its Northern California setting of Pacific City, where crime families with Italianate names manoeuvre for power and rumpiled police detectives wonder what they just glimpsed in the shadows. But Brereton's focus is on the monsters, particularly a group who are more authentically humane than most of the mortals, and led by the man known as Dr Nicodemus Horror.

Neither horrific nor technically a man, Doc Horror tends a band of outcasts with the paternal compassion of an early Professor X—if Charles Xavier had arrived from another dimension, escaping persecution from vicious squid-like monsters now intent on pursuing him across our world too. His nocturnal companions include Polychrome the wraith, Starfish the amphibian, and Gunwitch, a silent hulking enforcer wearing a hat from a Sergio Leone zombie western, who shoots first and never utters a word later. But the heart of all the stories, and the key to Brereton's intentions, is Horror's precocious, endearing and equally alien young daughter Eve. Horror was once employed as muscle for the Pacific City mob himself, although that was when he thought Eve had been lost in their trip across dimensions. Unexpectedly reunited with his only child, the alien man of violence rediscovers his humanity and changes his ways.

Similar arcs of compassion have played out across Brereton's Nocturnals tales ever since. In 2001 *The Dark* allowed Starfish to discover more about her aquatic lineage, and Brereton to deal explicitly with sea monsters and ancient races in the vein of HP Lovecraft; but also forced Eve to face her own insecurities, when another young girl-creature inserted herself into Doc Horror's affections. Most recently *The Sinister Path*, a 2017 crowd-funded one-shot, introduced two new creatures, an angry brother and sister from another sundered family with their own grudge against one of Horror's old friends. Eve, now more mature than she was in 1995 but still youthful and sharp as a tack, ultimately reunites an embittered parent with a lost child just as she was once reunited with her own father.

A loving universe

The effect of Brereton's comics comes from these humane—even romantic—stories, told with monsters, in art of vivid colour and muscular cartooning. *Black Planet* arrived on the heels of Alex Ross and Marvels, when Ross's crisp lines and Norman Rockwell figures seemed to be the path which painted mainstream comics would happily follow, but Brereton promptly went another way. The vivid pigments and visible brush strokes and soft fluid skies tie his painting back into century-old modernist traditions, while at the same time the 1970s comics art of Gene Colan and Tom Palmer is a constant presence in every shadowy room.

Brereton's series of portfolio art books shows what happens when he applies this style to other people's creations: Iron Man becomes a menacing golem against a thunderous sky, a ton of implacable matt statuary, the colours in his armour looking like seams in rock. Another piece has a naked spacegirl astronaut relaxing on an alien world, a respectful Wally Wood homage that takes Wood's symbols and sets them in motion at a higher temperature. There's even some Kirby Krackle in the sky.

Works like that also make Brereton's technique seem inherently American, most clearly so in the modest 1997 Nocturnals Halloween story *Witching Hour* that appeared in *Dark Horse Presents*. Eve and Gunwitch venture beyond the edge of town and encounter a clan of sarcastic pumpkin creatures in the woods, goblins who promptly mistake Eve's Halloween bucket for a dead relative. It's an interlude between the heavier stories, with Brereton's art modified to match, emphasising open panels, negative space, and a constant wash of pale moonlight; but at the same time a strip not a million miles from Charles Addams.

Brereton has lately started using Kickstarter to publish new Nocturnals stories and companion art books, which is as good a route as any for keeping both his art and Doc Horror's crew out in the wild where they belong. A comics landscape with these particular horrors in it can always look to them for a little empathy and human kindness. Misunderstood monsters can be persecuted and alien squids may pull the strings, but in Nocturnals the cosmos naturally bends towards optimism and compassion eventually, towards family and love. Even in the dark.

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Ten Years of Gratuitous Horror?

CROSSES

The past 15 years or so has seen a surge in popularity of the zombie, witness the cultural juggernaut "The Walking Dead", and the stores that have followed in its wake. Avatar Press, who have quietly built a reputation for an uncompromising vision, unrestricted creative freedom and rights (an anything goes editorial policy) certainly agree. This usually translates into gratuitous violence, graphic sex and a distinct lack of subtlety. But not all the time.

Many creators found this freedom immensely appealing, that, coupled with the greater creator rights, encouraged a number of famous writers to sign up and create books for the indie publisher. Warren Ellis was the first big name to make the jump to Avatar with titles such as "Strange Kiss", "Scars", "No Hero" and the survival horror title "Black Gas". Ellis was

quickly followed by Alan Moore and his books based on the works of HP Lovecraft and of course, Garth Ennis, who created the controversial and frankly brutal, zombie analogue "Crossed" to the table.

"Crossed" tells the story of a mysterious worldwide epidemic where the victims become released from their inhibitions, becoming sexually and violently rapacious. The infected are distinguished by the cross-like rash that runs across their eyes and from forehead to chin. Transmission of the virus is via bodily fluids and the disease takes hold within minutes, there is no cure. The infected are manically depraved, hysterical and insatiable, killing, eating and fornicating with anything that moves. But their former awareness, intelligence and memory remain - they know the purpose of tools, objects, vehicles etc. They take

pleasure from causing grievous harm, not just to the uninfected, but to each other and themselves. Injury merely sends them into an ecstatic and sexual frenzy. Against this backdrop the "Crossed" story arcs tell tales of communities trying to fight against the tide of the infected, whilst dealing with trying to maintain their humanity.

"Crossed" starts with a 10 issue series (0-9), written by Ennis with art by Jacen Burrows. No explanation is given for the origin of the plague, a seemingly normal man walks in to a diner in some small American town, and attacks the owner, things move quickly, like dominos passers-by fall as the infection spreads and the infected overcome the townsfolk. We follow Stan as he and other survivors head for the hills and seek sanctuary in Alaska. Our band are travelling across the US on their way to Alaska, foraging and competing for supplies with other bands of uninfected, picking up other survivors on the way, abandoning the crippled or ill to their fate, all the while being pursued by a band of the Crossed. Pragmatic and occasionally ruthless, the band leave behind parts of their humanity to survive, performing deplorable acts that would in normal circumstances be unthinkable.

characterisation raises what could otherwise be an extended gore fest. Ennis's usual character tropes are all present, the self reliant stoic and taciturn leader, the idealistic narrator / reader identification figure, the quiet one with the dark secret, the naive and doomed member. But it is these characterisations and the interactions between the cast, and the disturbing events that they suffer that make the series so compelling.

The success of the books led to a number of sequels and spin offs, including David Lapham's "Family Values" and "Psychopath" which with its serial killer "hero" put an interesting wrinkle on the run, and the fortnightly series "Crossed :Badlands" with rotating creative teams. This started strong, with some high profile writers attached notably Jamie Delano, Lapham, Ennis, Christos Gage and David Hine. Each writer brought their own spin on the "Crossed". However, gradually the series starts to suffer from the law of diminishing returns with creative teams trying to out do what went before, and the whole run begins to suffer with a kind of "horror fatigue". There are only so many times you can see sex crazed cannibals eating someone alive, and gradually the reader becomes desensitised

the world soon turns darker. Equally, Simon Spurrier weaves a fascinating tale in a webcomic called "Crossed :Wish you Were Here", a group of survivors head to remote Scottish islands to escape the plague and the infected. This seems like the perfect sanctuary until a ship load of uninfected arrive and disrupt the peace.

"Crossed", like other survival horror tales works best where you see how the relationships between the survivors are set against the horror of their predicament. Horror works best where it is a looming, shadowy and ever present threat. The tension is created in the choices the uninfected have to make to survive and evade the Crossed, all the while their humanity is gradually being chipped away. "Crossed" has suffered from over exposure, less is definitely more. But, ultimately the original series and Ennis's other tales, the Moore run on Crossed +100, Lapham and Spurriers all have much to recommend them, they are great examples of the survival horror genre and worth checking out.

S E D

Ennis and Burrows don't pull any punches, Avatar were known as being uncompromising, but Ennis set the template of the series by seeing how far he could set the bar of acceptability, and then leap over it. Ennis has a reputation for using a sledgehammer rather than a scalpel and neither shy away from the graphic violence starting from the opening episode. Don't read these books whilst eating your food, and don't leave them lying around for your kids to read them. I can't help but think that Ennis's well known opinions of religion have influenced his method of indicating the infected.

There is no subtlety here, nothing is inferred. The violence is explicit, harrowing and disturbing. "Crossed" sets new standards for imagination in graphic violence, but Ennis's ear for dialogue and

(okay, this one did anyway). Although incredibly graphic, the strength in Ennis and Burrows's original series was the relationships between the survivors, and it was that element that these books needed to maintain interest.

Leave it to Alan Moore and Simon Spurrier to make the series interesting again. In "Crossed +100" Moore took the series a hundred years into the future to see how this world developed and how the infected and uninfected coexist. Moore developed a new dialect for the series and is initially cautiously optimistic about how humanity has changed to account for the new status quo, scavenging, redeploying old technology, and how society has changed and become more tolerant in some aspects and less in others. But, as the uninfected have developed, so have the Crossed, and



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FIENDS of the EASTERN FRONT



Set in the recent past rather than the distant future, *Fiends of the Eastern Front* seemed like a bit of an anomaly when it debuted in 2000 AD in February 1980's Prog #152. But Gerry Finley-Day and Carlos Ezquerra's chilling ten-parter about a band of vampiric soldiers proved to be something of a sleeper hit, spawning a sequel *Stalingrad* by artist Colin MacNeil and writer David Bishop, who also penned several spin-off novels, which ran in the pages of the *Judge Dredd Magazine* in 2006. Now after Hannah Berry and Dani's one-off *Fodder* from the 2016 Free Comic Book Day issue, the *Undead Reds* are returning to the *Galaxy's Greatest Comic* with Ian Edginton and Dave Taylor's *1812*, which begins its six-issue run in Prog #1200.

"I read *Fiends of the Eastern Front* first time around and it's a story that stuck with me to this day," recalls Edginton. "It was such a simple but really strong idea. Vampires hiding in plain sight during the war was a natural fit."

Opening with an ominous present-day prologue before harking back to 1941 as German infantryman Hans Schmidt first encounters with the mysterious Captain Constanta and his sinister troupe of Romanian - or Rumanian as the story has it - *Fiends of the Eastern Front* was reminiscent of Finley-Day and Ezquerra's work together and individually on then-fellow IPC weekly *Battle Picture Weekly* on classic strips like *Rat Pack*, *Major Eazy* and *D-Day Dawson*. "With their background on *Battle*, Gerry and Carlos brought a flavour of the British war comics that I used to read as a kid," continues Edginton. "There's a nostalgic familiarity about it but then it's spiked with the twist of adding not only the vampires but also making you emphasise with the enemy, with Hans Schmidt as he contends with Constanta and his men."

For his part, although he has read 2000 AD since 1977's Prog #1, Taylor didn't initially remember reading *Fiends of the Eastern*

Front when it was first published. "I knew I'd read it, but with my shoddy memory, I was having difficulty until I found some of Carlos's art on the net," he admits. "An image of Carlos's Constanta brought it all back for me. As a young lad, I was typical in that I was fascinated with war, soldiers and all that shit, so Gerry's story was a joy. There's something totally logical about vampires involved with war, and to see Gerry and Carlos seemingly having so much fun grabbed my attention."

As its title indicates, *1812* takes place just over a century before Finley-Day and Ezquerra's original tale, keeping the same geographic location but swapping the Second World War for the Napoleonic Wars. "It was a perfect fit for the story, especially the chaotic retreat of Napoleon's *Grand Armee*," says Edginton. "Instead of the mud, blood and barbed wire of the two previous series, we have the snow and the biting cold as the Emperor's starving and demoralised army staggers home. Their beleaguered retreat is



With its grim conditions, constant skirmishes and bloody death toll, war makes a convenient backdrop for the Fiends's nefarious activities. "No one's going to pay mind to a few more dead bodies on the battlefield, and also vampires would make a handy secret weapon," reasons Edginton. "In this story, Constanta and his men are genuinely fighting for their country as well. The Romanians had been oppressed by the Russians for years, so it was natural that they'd ally themselves with the French."

While the first Fiends was told from

numerous regiments on both sides, demanded I bury myself in days of research," he laughs. "I'd not been overly familiar with this particular period, apart from owning an amazing album of Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture, so it took me a while to get my head around just how many variations there were in the damn uniforms, and why. Our hero, outside of Constanta, belongs to a particular regiment, but he's surrounded by Napoleon's Grande Army, bedecked in a mind-boggling array of ridiculously detailed costumes, so it's been an education!"

With Edginton and Taylor's inaugural six-part ending on an intriguing cliffhanger with Prog #2105, Fiends of the Eastern Front



the backdrop as they're preyed upon by supernatural forces."

While Fiends was apparently self-contained, Finley-Day actually posits the possibility of further stories in episode nine when the vampires' human helper, Corporal Cringu boasts that Constanta had 'fought for Rumania for centuries!' - battling the Tartars and the Turks and now the Germans. "I've always wanted to know more about Constanta, and his background," says Edginton. "Why was he so eager to cover their tracks? Was he, in fact, hiding from someone or something? There's a rich vein of material that's waiting to be explored."

"We see it as a totally open and unrestrained story," adds Taylor. "Constanta as a character could easily be a regular feature for 2000 AD. If an intellectual property has a solid and successful history, tried and tested, there's no reason it couldn't be made into a contemporary success."

Hans Schmidt's perspective, Edginton and Taylor introduce a new human protagonist in the form of French officer Major D'Hubert. "Constanta seems to be fighting for his country, but he also has other motives, while D'Hubert is a decent, honest soldier, an honourable man who finds himself in circumstances that test his sanity and ultimately change his life," teases Edginton. "There is also a third player but I'm not going to say much as I don't want to give the game away."

"D'Hubert is a general, a brave and wise leader of men who fights this war because he has no choice," adds Taylor. "He's a good man falling into Hell."

While Edginton insists that he didn't want to burden Taylor with too much homework, the long time Judge Dredd artist admits that he couldn't help sometimes getting bogged down in historical detail. "The second page, featuring a grande battle between the

will return in December's Prog #2111. And while Edginton reveals that, "Dave and I are talking about working on a couple of things including more Fiends," both writer and artist would be interested in returning for another prequel if not a sequel. "I'm also working with Tiernen Trevallion on another Fiends story that's set in a different time period," he says. "But I can't say much about that right now!"

"There's a very good chance we'll be seeing Constanta again," adds Taylor. "I've certainly had a lot of fun doing 1812, and Vietnam - that's all I'm saying!"

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MISTY & SCREAM!

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After the success of last year's *Scream!* & *Misty* Special - or *Misty & Scream!* depending on what cover you purchased - it was surely inevitable that Rebellion's one-off revival of IPC's late '70/ early '80s horror weeklies would return for a second serving of scary stories. Stating that, "it turned out quite well, albeit with plenty of room for improvement," *Treasury of Britain* editor Keith Richardson believes that this year's edition is a big step up on last Halloween's debut volume, especially as he isn't sure than the two titles are necessarily compatible despite their shared spooky themes.

"I wouldn't say that they were natural bedfellows," he says. "But times change, lines blur and things evolve, and Rebellions versions of *Scream!* and *Misty* blend quite well together."

With *The Thirteenth Floor* and *Black Max* the only continuing stories, there's a newfound emphasis on standalone tales. With Richardson noting that,

"*Misty* was mostly one-and-done strips, so it seems quite apt," the much loved girls' horror comic is represented more by its unique spirit than in previously published characters due to the absence of the Hannah Berry-written *The Return of The Sentinels* due to artist Ben Willsher's unavailability. But at least *Misty* herself is depicted strikingly in Czech artist Lenka Simickova's sumptuous alternate cover while American artist Kyle Hotz supplies the main cover. "I became aware of Lenka's work just after we published the first *Scream!* and *Misty*," he says. "She's an amazing talent with a beautifully dark and disturbing imagination, so I was over the moon when she agreed to do a cover for us. And I chose to Kyle Hotz onboard because he is an awesome horror artist - one of the best in the business, so he was on the shortlist to approach. Serendipity then came into play, because around the same time I was planning to approach him, he had been emailing Matt Smith at 2000 AD."

With Richardson revealing that *The Thirteenth Floor* and *Black Max* were written with longer storylines in mind, both were obvious choices to return for second installments by the same creative teams. "Getting to write *The Thirteenth Floor* was pure good fortune on my part," says Guy Adams, who once again teams up with artists John Stokes and Fraser Irving. "It was the one strip I would have genuinely committed murder for, as I loved it

as a kid, both in *Scream!* and later *Eagle*."

Indeed *The Thirteenth Floor* enjoyed a long run in *The New Eagle*, which lasted considerably longer than *Scream!*'s mere four-month existence, and crazed computer Max even became *Eagle*'s fictional editor after the comic was relaunched in 1990. "I've tried to have my cake and eat it," laughs Adams. "It clearly works as a sequel to the original strip, as I even cover the fact that Maxwell Tower is supposed to have burned down, but it also stands alone as a new piece. The concept of *The Thirteenth Floor* is such a cast-iron idea: A computer who, in its urge to protect, ends up becoming a killer. Or was it always that? And my version brings a child accomplice onboard that seasons things a touch more."

Max also turned up in *The Vigilant* - *Rebellion*'s recent special uniting various classic superhero-esque IPC characters - although Richardson insists that things aren't as straight forward as they might appear. "Max is so cool that we just had to include him in *The Vigilant*," he claims. "All the best super-teams have cool bases, and *The Thirteenth Floor* is up there with the best of them! The synergy is there in the background, although the Max in *Scream!* might not necessarily be the same Max who appears in *The Vigilant*, who are a team

composed of members from a variety of different realities."

After scripting the self-contained *Misty*-style *Fate of the Fairy Hunter* last time around, Alex Worley has teamed up with artist Dani once again, although on this occasion the pair are reviving a character that was actually featured in the 1988 *Scream* Holiday Special, although its roots date back much earlier than that. "For the second special, I begged Keith to let me pitch him a *Black Beth* story," explains Worley. "She just dominated the whole special, and I remember wondering as a kid why there was a sword and sorcery strip in a horror comic, but I loved it all the same. In doing research for the pitch, I ended up contacting several of the original editors to try and piece together how the original strip had come about. The name of Beth's original writer has since been lost in the mists of time but I spoke to Dez Skinn, Barrie Tomlinson and the original artist Blas Gallago, who is now in his seventies and who was delighted to hear his work was so fondly remembered."

By extraordinary coincidence, *Black Beth* had originally been conceived in the mid-seventies as part of an aborted IPC comic, which was also called *Scream*. "The pages lay in a drawer for over ten years before

being exhumed for the *Holiday Special*," continues Worley. "In writing the new version, I wanted to dare to be uncool and avoid any kind of hip, sixty-quiups per minute Whedonspeak. I didn't have room to bathe in this world, but I wanted to play it totally straight- just like in an original *Scream!* *Misty* - not for laughs or irony but to get that heartfelt swashbuckling flavor you get from a vintage *Savage Sword of Conan* comic, or an old issue of *Creepy* or *Eerie*."

Describing it "a great zombie/ Grindhouse/ comedy mashup," Richardson suggests that Rich McAuliffe and Steve Mannion's *Decomposition Jones* would feel more at home in a vintage US horror anthology like *Creepy* or *Eerie* than *Misty* or *Scream!* "Rich wrote a very funny story for Zarjaz, titled *Judge Pigg* and I wanted to have more humour in this year's offering," he says. "Steve Mannion is one of my fave artists in the business today, and I thought *Decomposition Jones* would appeal to him, which it did."

Having also featured in 2000 AD fanzine *Zarjaz*, Lizzie Boyle was assigned to the *Best Friends Forever*, due to her more ability to mix horror with laughs. "The editorial team were looking for someone with a penchant for finding the humour in gristle and gore," she says. "A copy of indie comic *Sentient Zombie Space Pigs* found its way to them, and they obvious found me suitably disturbing."

Partnered with artist Yishan Li, Boyle immersed herself in *Misty*'s back catalogue in order to evoke the beloved comic's distinctive atmosphere. "There's a naivety about some of the original characters, an acceptance that this is the way of the world and that monsters are a part of it," she says. "There's also a devilishness, a sense of mischief, particularly from the girls, which I wanted to explore."

Along with the second *Scream!* and *Misty* Special, *Rebellion* has also just published its third *Misty* reprint collection, which features the fifteen-part *Wolf Girl*, which spanned #65 to #80 from May to August 1979, as it's principle story. "I primarily chose *Wolf Girl* because I was so blown away by the story," says Richardson. "That shaped the rest of the book, which is now werewolf/ lupine themed, as it also features some great back-up strips including some fantastic art by the great Badia Romero."



STALKING THE SHADOWS

Dracula at Marvel UK



A dark shadow was cast over the UK comic landscape in 1974.

It was 1897 when Bram Stoker first told of the ship that spawned the monster, beached one stormy night at Whitby. Over seventy years after it first stalked the shores of Britain that same monster returned, aided now by yet more macabre creatures of the night. Yet this new onslaught now emanated from High Holborn, London and Marvel Comic's continued 1970's UK expansion with its new weekly comic *Dracula Lives*.

Following the October 1972 launch of flagship title *The Mighty World Of Marvel* (MWOM) Marvel UK had wasted little time establishing a line of titles competing with IPC and DC Thompson for the pocket money of a nation's youth, with both *Spiderman Comics Weekly* (February 1973) and *The Avengers* (September 1973) showcasing a plethora of top-tier Marvel super-heroes. If seen by some as merely inferior reprints, for many younger readers unaware of the imported Marvel US colour titles (or the earlier UK Odhams line of 'Power' comics) these titles offered up weekly bursts of pure adrenaline-rush, with early, unseen chapters of Marvel's top-tier characters.

Mirroring moves already underway at Marvel US, the UK line then began sailing into the uncharted seas of horror and fantasy with two brand new weeklies introduced the same week in October 1974. Both *Planet of the Apes* and *Dracula Lives* sought to cash in upon then current trends; the former basking in the glow of the CBS television series



currently making waves on British television, with the latter a direct result of the relaxation of Comics Code rules in the early '70's when, after years of prohibition, vampires, werewolves and other monstrosities suddenly became fair game. Borrowing the same title sans exclamation mark of the US Marvel magazine launched in June 1973, for eight new pence (or the price of your very soul) the UK Dracula Lives would showcase the company's most high profile chillers. Launching the week ending October 26th (in time for halloween) an introductory message from Stan Lee sought to reassure the predominantly young audience that this new comic was produced by the same people behind Spiderman and the Fantastic Four and therefore everything would be fine - we know vampires and the living dead don't really exist - "or do we?" With the question still hanging in the air, we're immediately launched into a line up from Marvel that couldn't have been stronger, adding Werewolf by Night and Monster of Frankenstein reprints to the mix alongside the lead Tomb of Dracula strip. Marvel had sent in the big guns, and doing so ensured that the artistic side of the endeavour, for that early run of issues at least, would be dominated by just two men; Gene Colan and Mike Ploog.

Colan's penciling was made for black and white reproduction. From the opening splash of a rainswept Castle Dracula, his dark shadows and moody magnificence dominate every page, compensating for the at-times clunkiness of Gerry Conway's script. Colan's heavy pencils and shading only benefits from losing its original American colour and when inker Tom Palmer came on board in latter issues, imbuing the pencils in even more sinister shades and somehow complimenting Colan's work in a way no other inker ever quite could, the strip would look better still.

Ploog's artwork is the other highlight of these early issues. Lending an air of gothic mid-European detail to the moonlit back alleys of downtown Los Angeles for the Werewolf strip was never going to be an easy ask, but here, in some of his earliest work for Marvel, he manages it with aplomb. The savage ferocity of the main protagonist is never in doubt, yet he's also lent an almost debonair grace in posture and movement. Ploog's dark figures silhouetted against the moon lose none of their impact in black and white either, while the occasional cartoonish look of the supporting characters facial features (an early trait of his work) actually works well here, adding an otherworldliness to a strip that actually premiered in the US first, beating Tomb... by a couple of months. Yet as good as Ploog is here, his later work on Monster of Frankenstein, the third reprinted strip, easily outshines it. Both a blistering arctic opening and a 19th century gothic European flashback are rendered impeccably, capturing the raging arctic elements, windswept moonlight moor and howling rain.

Here was a title that seemed to fit perfectly into the then current Marvel UK weekly format. The shift from the earlier duotone pages (with occasional colour) of the weeklies to purely black and white interiors sometimes saw strips initially suffering from heavy print or overbearing

shading. Here such an occurrence only enhanced the gothic, spooky feel of a title which quickly settled down with its three quality ongoing strips and complimented by a 'Cryptic Correspondence' letters page.

However a reliance on purely reprint material sees quality entirely dependant on the quality of the source strips themselves, and certainly as the weeks went by Werewolf by Night would suffer fatal wounds once Ploog left the strip. Yet a huge ace up the sleeve for this particular weekly lay with the lead title. After a mixed start with various scribes writer Marv Wolfman took up the mantle, destined, along with the settled artistic team of Colan and Palmer, to take Tomb Of Dracula on a quality, if insular and maverick run throughout the remainder of the decade. Here was a book that remained outside the Marvel superhero mainstream, with a slightly more mature ongoing narrative and a stellar supporting cast that included Wolfman's own 1973 creation Blade, vampire killer and hunter.

Yet even consistent quality couldn't hold at bay an inherent problem with the Marvel UK line. With an appetite as insatiable as the Lord of the Vampires own blood lust, weekly publication meant eating up the original monthly US inventory, the clock continually ticking to some not-to-distant future where the material left to reprint would simply run out. Solutions were sought long term but in the short term the very nature of the beast saw a rapid changeover in strips across the weekly line. Frankenstein was the first casualty, replaced in No.42 by The Living Mummy, three-thousand year old survivor of ancient Egypt, ironically not destined to live very long here. Perhaps a portent of things to come, the comic's title itself changed to Dracula Lives featuring the Legion of Monsters with No.60, prior to muck monster Man-Thing reprints beginning in No.62.

The stormy seas of the 1970's UK comics landscape were to prove more hazardous than the voyage of that ship beached at Whitby. Ghost Rider made an appearance in No.79, finally replacing a now-devoured Werewolf strip, leaving the good Count himself sole survivor from the original line up. The comic itself effectively ended with No.87, merging in true British

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comic style with another, yet if Planet Of the Apes and Dracula Lives would see the title live on in name for a while yet, in what proved to be a stake through the heart for all true vampire fans the Counts own strip only managed to hang around for a few issues thereafter. Gerber's Man-Thing had become the last vestige of a once mighty macabre weekly, with a Dracula Lives Special produced by World Distributors in 1976 doing little to ease the yearning of many lost souls.

Yet as any good vampire would tell you, there is a life after death, of sorts. With a June 1977 UK Bullpen Bulletins page proclaiming 'the return of everybody's favourite fear-feature,' the Count made a grand return to the UK scene as The Mighty World of Marvel starring the Incredible Hulk and Dracula Lives hit the stands with MWOM No.247. Wolfman's narrative somehow demanded the unusual step of providing an opening double page character synopsis, re-introducing the Lord of Vampires and his reoccurring cast of Rachel Van Helsing, Frank Blake, Harold H Harold, Quincy Harker and Blade to the UK readership. If much heralded, the return was to unfortunately prove a false dawn with No.257 the last to feature a Dracula Lives masthead as the main title merged with failed war comic Fury the next week. In what was to prove his last appearance in the UK line for a while, Dracula actually made the cut for the first merged issue, ironically the same week a letter in the 'Mighty Marvel Mailbag' page appeared praising the strips recent return, if bemoaning unexplained jumps in continuity. Summing up the haphazard, slapdash (if somewhat endearing) nature of Marvel UK at the time, the editorial reply explained that some of these 'missing' stories had indeed been reprinted, in the Doctor Strange strip of sister comic Spiderman!

Worse was to come. January 1979 saw the UK 'Marvel Revolution' with major changes undertaken to the entire line that sought to address long standing issues and failing sales. An undoubtedly positive aspect of these changes saw a move towards more original (and some truly high quality) strips from UK creators such as Steve Dillon, David Lloyd, John

Stokes and Dave Gibbons, showcased in titles such as Hulk Comic and Doctor Who Weekly. Yet the impact on the longstanding reprint strips was initially disastrous. In an attempt to reproduce the look of homegrown UK weekly anthology titles, the revamped Marvel Comic and Spiderman Comic saw the number of strips in each title almost double, but with the reduced page count the strips themselves were cut up with more panels squeezed onto a single page, dramatically shrinking the original artwork down in size. With the Spiderman title taking the lions share of superheroes, the once mighty flagship MWOM now served up an even more infantile dish of 'secret agents, dinosaurs, vampires and pirates.' Whilst the changes weren't necessarily to the detriment of some of the more mainstream strips (and the return of Dracula reprints to the pages of Marvel UK most certainly a welcome one) the feature seemed completely at odds in its new surroundings, with some of the creative teams best work being chopped up, shrunken down and squeezed into a couple of pages somewhere between Godzilla and Skull the Slayer. The end, when it did come, seemed almost merciful, even if many followers of the Counts nefarious schemes were again left feeling shortchanged. 'The Dark Lord will return next week' ran the legend at the end of No.349, yet in No.350 there was no sign, not even one solitary vampire bat gliding away through an open window onto the gentle air current of a still night.

Yet it's hard keeping the undead down and once again Vlad Dracula rose from the grave, this time as part of a line up of 'pocket books' launched in 1980. Chiller Pocket Book began in March that year and if the smaller format saw the original artwork shrunk down in size again, at



least (as Dez Skinn's editorial proclaims) the strip was now being seen in feature length episodes for the very first time in the UK. Admirable back-up this time around was provided by the likes of Satana, Ghost Rider and (again) Man-Thing and it was also pleasing to see the Wolfman/ Colan/ Palmer opus kicking on from exactly where it left off, even if the page count was shrunk on occasion by Gerber's albeit worthy muck-monster. Chiller would survive until July 1982, with a Dracula Summer Special that same year ultimately proving to be the (ahem) final nail in the coffin.

Marvel's take on Bram Stoker's most famous creation was as apart from the original source material as it was the rest of the Marvel Universe. The entire run of issues at times read like instalments of a novel, with the ongoing, more mature narrative benefiting from a complete reading, something that just didn't seem possible to replicate in the hectic, haphazard world of Marvel UK in the 1970's. However if not necessarily something a Lord of Darkness would appreciate, it's fair to say that Marvel UK gave the good Count his fair share of time in the limelight. Deservedly so.

WHACKOMAN!



BY MARC JACKSON

LAST TIME... BUGSY GOT CAPTURED BY THE PARTY KING AND WHACKOMAN, GOT PARTIED TO DEATH!...



Horrors Yet to Come Moore and Campbell's

FROM

HELL

Ten years in the making, the retelling of the horrific Whitechapel Murders remains a high water mark of the comic medium

They even do guided tours now. Well over a hundred years later, with murder mere myth, crowds still flock to the site of gruesome, grizzly death. They map out routes through a warren of old streets and dare to enter the same dark alleyway where a victim took her last few remaining steps. They seek sustenance in the very pub where Polly Nicholls allegedly drank away her 'doss' money shortly before her mutilated body was found in the early hours of that last day of summer. Once nourished they step outside, faced with the looming pomposity of Christ Church, Spitalfields, shrouding the nooks and cranny's of Whitechapel in dark shadow just as it did a poor and destitute populace with a killer in their midst.

The Whitechapel Murders of 1888 still retain their hold on our collective consciousness to this day, with 'Jack the Ripper' a name long entered into that infamous hall of fame reserved for the very worst of nightmares. A slew of books, films, articles, television dramas and documentaries have all attempted to recreate, judge, lay claim to the truth. They seek to make sense of the horror, account for the madness, finally solve the puzzle. Many are noteworthy although more are borne of opportunist or charlatan. Due to the combined efforts of two of the UK's finest creators, comics are one medium at least that has treated those awful events with a gravitas and respect they deserve. Yet *From Hell* by Northampton's Alan Moore and Glasgow's Eddie Campbell always had loftier ambitions than that.

By 1988 Alan Moore was already sailing away from a recently conquered comics mainstream. With his relationship with DC Comics fatally soured over rights issues surrounding the acclaimed *Watchmen* and refusing outright to even consider working for Marvel, bridges had been irreparably burnt. Yet where some might rue lost opportunity Moore saw only freedom, retaining his strong belief in comics as a form that had yet to realise its full literary potential. The setting up of *Mad Love* as a



"Campbell's scratchy, naturalistic style was about as far away from the mainstream as you could get"

new independent publishing outlet for his own and others work and its initial success with one-off anthology AARGH (Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia) proved what possibilities lay beyond a corporate mainstream obsessed with superheroes.

One area of focus for a possible future work lay at an extreme edge of the spectrum of human experience. How does an occurrence such as murder actually come about? Who would be inclined to carry out such an act? Why? Having settled on the subject, Moore had initially rejected the idea of using the infamous 'Ripper' crimes as a basis for any possible piece, reasonably believing that so much had been said and written on the subject there was precious little to add. Yet in 1988 with the attendant publicity surrounding the centenary of the killings he became intrigued, in particular by Stephen Knight's book *Jack The Ripper: The Final Solution*. Originally published twelve years earlier, with many of its theories already discredited by other so called 'experts', Knight's book nevertheless proved to be a turning point for Moore. *Whitechapel 1888* and its surrounding myth had everything he needed.

At least five women (some accounts put the figure higher), all living and working as prostitutes in the economically deprived Whitechapel area of London's East End, were brutally murdered during the Autumn of 1888, all within the same small radius and all, it's commonly accepted, by the same person. If we add the details of the coroners reports concerning nature of death and injuries sustained then we have what are the accepted facts of the case. Moore knew that through comics he could paint as accurate and truthful a portrayal of all this as possible, capable of depicting the reality of the victims poverty-stricken lives and without shrinking from the unimaginable horror of their deaths. Yes there would be conjecture (Knight's own assertions of masonic intrigue, royal indiscretion, illegitimate children, attempted blackmail and establishment cover up would all be brought to the fore)

but through all this Moore could shine a light on hidden truths behind the Victorian facade; the deep social divisions, the violent misogyny and what he perceived to be sinister occult undertones. He wanted to map the ripples that flowed through the years following the explosive impact of these horrific events and the (even contemporary) collective madness surrounding them (fake ripper claims, mass hysteria of the press) all within the context of the general turbulence of the period. Here was the real beginning of the twentieth century, a harbinger of horrors yet to come.

Unconcerned with any potential mass audience, Moore hooked up with former collaborator and fellow discontent Steve Bissette. The former Swamp Thing artist also coveted his freedom and independence now, forming his own Spiderbaby Graphix company from which sprang *Taboo*, an anthology horror title depicting his own and others personal brands of undiluted horror. Upon first speaking to Moore on the subject of *From Hell*, Bissette was astounded to find himself given an outline of the complete concept from beginning to end, with all 16 chapters, prologue and epilogue already mapped out in the author's mind.

It was through Bissette that Glasgow born artist Eddie Campbell was brought on board. Campbell's scratchy, naturalistic style was about as far away from the mainstream as you could get and Moore had been an early convert, praising Campbell's self-produced work in a fanzine review written for *Marvel UK's Daredevils* magazine in 1983. If in awe of Campbell's art, Moore thought the writing better still, believing Campbell even then to be '...one of the most interesting talents, amateur or professional, working in comics.'

With Campbell on board, both Bissette and Moore saw exciting avenues opening up. The natural realism and sharp observation of the art would ensure the 'horror' aspect of the series could speak for itself, a world away from some fake cliché-riddled Hollywood re-telling of leading lady, fog shrouded London street and shadowy pursuer in top

hat. Rather, *From Hell* would deposit you deep into the heart of Whitechapel 1888 where the squalor and deprivation was all too visible and where the sound you could hear was of a blade being sharpened.

An eight page prologue appeared in Issue 124 of Dave Sim's *Cerebus the Aardvark* (July 1989), its opening shot of a dead, rotting seagull carcass surrounded by flies immediately giving notice to any diehard fans of Moore's superhero work that this was not another *Tales of the Green Lantern Corps*. With Chapter One following in the second issue of *Taboo* that September, the strip quickly settles on its structure of a nine panel grid (even if many pages never pass without panel expansion for emphasis) and dispensing with thought balloons and third person narrated captions. With Campbell adapting his art to look as he believed it would have if rendered in 1888 itself, and with Moore utilising his ear for naturalistic dialogue to the full, this was not an immediate easy read for many. Yet here was a brutally honest work, immediately labelling itself as melodrama even when going to painstaking lengths to use as much established fact as was possible. The patient reader becomes immersed in a weaving narrative connecting the poor destitute streets of Whitechapel, and victim Marie Kelly in particular, through to the very head of Crown and Empire and Queen Victoria herself (the depiction of whom was an apparent area of contention between the two creators). The horror and sense of foreboding seems real, griping the reader from the onset whilst making no pretence at ever being some parlour-game 'whodunnit'; the 'Rippers' identity, the same as in Knight's book, being pretty much revealed in Chapter Two long before the first murder. Moore's plot evolves naturally, each chapter unfolding at its own length and pace. If the idea originally sold to Campbell was one of sixteen chapters of eight pages each, a sobering reality soon became apparent. After the prologue, the first chapter came in at twelve pages and the second at thirty-two, with a later instalment clocking in at fifty-eight. Speaking to the *Comics Journal* in

"This is a horror that is all too real. It actually happened. They do guided tours now"



1991, Moore acknowledged the extra burdens placed on an artist in such circumstances, but heated debates about Queen Victoria aside, the collaboration seemed to be remaining on a sound enough footing as "...the beauty of working with Eddie is that you can ask an awful lot of him and he'll come through."

If the creative side of things remained sound, the situation behind the scenes at Taboo seemed the opposite. Bissette spoke to the comics press about complaints with the books contents, with what he described as the 'natural lovemaking' depicted in Moore and Campbell's opening chapter being one of the reasons Issue 2 had to be presented to nine different binders before finally one company agreed to put the issue together. Subsequent issues also appeared slowly; Issue 3 in March 1990 with Issue 4 not appearing until February 1991. Kevin Eastman's Tundra helped ease the apparent financial burdens of producing that issue before striking a deal that saw them taking over completely with Issue 5, which finally showed up in November that year.

The snails pace of publication certainly wasn't to the detriment of the work; Moore and Campbell seem to revel in a freedom away from editorial constraints. How else to explain the remarkable

Chapter Four appearing that November? On the surface this latest instalment to their 'horror' story consists of 38 pages of two men chatting on a sightseeing horse and carriage tour of London. Yet it's the most sinister chapter so far. As carriage wheels wobble over cobbled streets from early morning through to evening, our main protagonist (the Ripper himself) spells out for his servile coachman and accomplice the true nature of the capitals great landmarks surrounding them. As dusk approaches it dawns on his employee, and us, that London, cradle to the Great British Empire, seems but a sinister age-old character in itself; the turrets and spires and churches (such as those designed by architect Nicholas Hawksmoor) now seen for the first time through a masonic, occult, violent misogyny. We take new meaning from the marble and granite, the cold hold these buildings have over a populace dwarfed by them. We feel an intense sense of foreboding as Hawksmoor's Christ Church, Spitalfields looms ahead, knowing a brutal killer, fortified by forces inherent in his very surroundings, is but surveying the lay of the land, plotting his route, planning his imminent return. Campbell's artwork reaches new heights here; panels are stretched and widened to fully convey the sinister architectural splendour. Defying all storytelling logic it's a chapter that shouldn't work but the sheer depth of the writing and precision

of the art make each page come alive. That final full page panel of London at dusk with the dome of St Paul's and other church spires dominating the skyline over a darkness now enveloping the populace below serves up a palpable sense of dread; we know this story, we know what's about to come. The sheer weight of the hostile forces and negative energy about to extinguish the lives of five women seem overwhelming and insurmountable, reinforced and 'engraved in stone' all around them, already having kept them in check for the entirety of their so very short lives. What possible hope did they ever really have?

Groundbreaking work can have profound effects, and so it proved even for Alan Moore himself. It was during the writing of this chapter that his main character utters lines pertaining to gods existing for real if only in ones own mind. Moore would reflect on the implications of this, finding it to be a piece of logic he just couldn't ignore. His research of fractal mathematics for the aborted Big Numbers book fused with his research on ritual and the occult for From Hell, with Moore making a connection between the two of language, or rather language with the power to change events. Conversations with close friend and UK comics writer Steve Moore (himself long a student of the occult and practitioner of magic ritual) led to further research himself, all first steps on a road

that would lead him, on the day of his fortieth birthday, to declare to family and friends that he was now a practicing magician. Serious and open on the subject in interviews from the very beginning, even when seemingly sending himself up, Moore was happy to counter what he saw as “too much dark on what is a lucid and fluorescent subject,” one which has unarguably informed much of his work ever since and invariably adds further depth and texture to the mix.

The life-changing work in question needed to find a new home with Kitchen Sink Press following the collapse of Taboo. After initially reprinting the already-published chapters, a new instalment eventually showed up in the eponymous From Hell issue 4 dated March 1994. With the sheer scale of the project now becoming apparent, Moore saw fit to begin writing detailed appendixes accompanying each new chapter which not only enhanced the reading experience but shed greater light on the amount of historical accuracy and detail of the strip.

This accuracy and attention to detail would only add to its overall impact. If the sinister Chapter Four had seemed merely chilling, the horror of Chapter Ten is visceral. For 34 pages the reader is locked in the tiny lodging room at 13 Millers Court with the killer and his final victim, Marie, or Mary Kelly. The futility of the victim holding up bedclothes to her face for protection and the knowledge of what is to come is gut wrenching; for her or the reader there will be no escape as Moore and Campbell bar all exits. One of the most harrowing reads ever, and fully intended to be, we get panel after panel from the killers point of view, share his icy calculating stare, his hallucinations, his visions, immersed in the madness of someone who can justifiably be described as one of the sickest bastards ever. We feel the claustrophobia in that tiny lodging room, the heat from the fire, the feelings of nausea worsened when he turns and somehow seems to face us, the reader. You picture yourself in that room, with killer and victim, both now infamous, questioning why you're there in the first place. Moore had read all the reports of the death and of Kelly's horrific injuries. This is a horror that is all too real. It actually happened.

They do guided tours now.

The momentum that has built up to this most final of horrors doesn't let up once it's over with the remaining chapters remarkably containing some of the best work. The story plays out with the actual 'solving' of the case and subsequent establishment cover up, before we witness the final fate of the killer himself. We follow his spirit, this patron saint of murder, through time and space itself, meeting Ian Brady, Myra Hindley and Peter Sutcliffe (daubed the 'Yorkshire Ripper' by a salivating gutter-press) along the way. A harrowing, bleak read, yet it's here right near the end that, just once, Moore and Campbell offer up the briefest flicker of hope and respite. Moore cryptically refuses to comment on the penultimate page of Chapter Fourteen in his otherwise forthcoming and detailed appendix, telling the reader they'll just have to figure this one out for themselves. For this reader at least it's an unexpected ray of light amid the unremitting bleakness.

That wasn't quite it. In September 1998, ten years after its initial conception, the final appendix was published. 'Dance of the Gull Catchers' remains a quite stunning coda, acting as commentary on the Ripper phenomenon and subsequent media circus of which, with no hint of irony on their part, Moore and Campbell freely admit they are now a part of. Campbell produces some remarkable work here, a final denouement that remains moving, poignant and at times hilarious. Then, finally, From Hell was no more.

The first of Alan Moore's comics work to be adapted into a film, the From Hell movie is by some accounts not bad, even if attempting to transpose Johnny Depp or Heather Graham into the world depicted on the pages of the strip seems a foolhardy endeavour. Film and other mediums have had plenty of opportunity to 'say something' about the Whitechapel Murders over the years, and unlike any film adaptation by definition, the comic was created with no agenda other than to be itself. Rightly lauded, From Hell the comic remains, if anything, underrated; the scale of its achievement becoming apparent when the complete work was finally published as a single volume (initially by Campbell himself in

December 1999 before a UK edition from Knockabout in 2000). The publication of the From Hell Companion in 2013, with extracts from Moore's scripts and Campbell's own commentary, remains an invaluable read for anyone with an interest in the work, giving a unique insight into the creative process, and the publication in 2018 of From Hell: Master Edition, a ten part series with new full colourisation by Campbell has also piqued much interest (Campbell has spoken of the joy of revisiting the original pages and colouring the work from scratch, rising to the many challenges).

However you decide to immerse yourself in this groundbreaking work, just don't expect to find any answers. As unpalatable as the fact is, the Whitechapel murders will forever remain unresolved. It's perhaps most succinctly summed up in the collected edition's dedication; affording five people a heartfelt respect never forthcoming in their own short lifetimes:



'...to Polly Nichols, Anne Chapman, Liz Stride, Kate Eddows and Marie Jeanette Kelly. You and your demise: of these things alone are we certain. Goodnight, ladies.'

Author: Peter Gouldson
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As long as the Doctor exists, in comics as well as on TV, there will always be monsters for him to fight.



Artwork: Roach/Offredi/Langridge (c) Doctor Who Magazine/Panini

MONSTER MASH

In TV Comic in the 1960s, the First Doctor and his grandchildren, John and Gillian, came up against a host of nasty enemies. In the first TV Comic Doctor Who story, The Klepton Parasites (November 1964 to January 1965), the Kleptons were a humanoid race with large eyes and rubbery snouts. When their own planet moved too close to its sun, they built an underwater city on the planet of the Thaines, but were repelled by the Thaines with the help of the Doctor and his grandchildren. Later, in On The Web Planet, (March to April 1965), the time travellers encountered the ant-like Zarbi from the television story The Web Planet. In this adventure, the Zarbi were controlled by the evil Skirkons, humanoid creatures with beak-like noses, who wanted to mine the Zarbi planet, Vortis, for Galvinium X. This story began a mere week after The Web Planet had completed its run on TV. Some of the 'monsters' encountered by the Doctor, John and Gillian were very human - they came across the Pied Piper of Hamelin in 1284 (Challenge of the Piper, June to July 1965) and they also helped Santa Claus defeat a malevolent entity called the Demon Magician! (A Christmas Story, December 1965 to January 1966).

Meanwhile, in the pages of TV Century 21 from 1965 to 1967, the Daleks were strutting their stuff without the help or hindrance of the Doctor in the strip known retrospectively as The Dalek Chronicles. Over 104 one-page episodes (largely written by Doctor Who story editor David Whittaker and beautifully illustrated by comics legend Richard Jennings, Eric Eden and Ron Turner), the strip was to



Artwork: Roach/Offredi/Langridge (c) Doctor Who Magazine/Panini

prove to be a huge influence on later Doctor Who comic artists such as Lee Sullivan. The Emperor Dalek was a key character in the stories, which told of the creation of the Daleks, the expansion of the Dalek Empire and their war with the Mechanoids. We also met the infamous Dalek Zeg, a Dalek inventor who duelled with the Emperor for supremacy but sadly lost!

The Patrick Troughton years on TV are often called 'The Monster Years' by the programme's fans and the monsters were out in force in the comics as well! TV Comic continued to run the Doctor's adventures. In the second Troughton strip, The Trodos Ambush (January to

with events in the TV series and featured walking scarecrows, sent by the Time Lords, which forced the Doctor to regenerate.

The Third Doctor, played by Jon Pertwee on TV, appeared in the pages of both TV Action and Countdown. He encountered classic TV monsters such as the Daleks on the printed page but also came across creatures unique to the comic strip medium, such as huge insects created by a new insecticide (Insect, April to May 1970).

Tom Baker's Fourth Doctor also appeared in TV Comic, but most fans would agree that his most memorable strips appeared in Marvel's Doctor Who

nonetheless enjoyed some classic adventures. Perhaps the most interesting from a monster point of view was 4 Dimensional Vistas (July to December 1983), by Steve Parkhouse, which saw the return of the reptilian Ice Warriors.

The Sixth Doctor's era in Doctor Who Magazine was drawn exclusively by artist John Ridgway, bringing a welcome element of visual continuity to the strip. The first Colin Baker strip, The Shape Shifter (May to June 1984) introduced Frobisher, a shape shifting Whifferdill. Not really a 'monster' (he adopted the form of a penguin and became the Doctor's companion!), Frobisher was nonetheless one of the most memorable



Artwork: Pasquale Qualano (c)Titan Comics

February 1967), the Doctor attempted to make peace with the Trods, a robotic race first encountered by the Hartnell Doctor. Unfortunately, the Daleks, in their first appearance in the main Doctor Who comic strip, had other ideas and wanted to destroy the Trods. Thankfully, some of the Trods survived and helped the Doctor and his companions to escape.

The Cybermen had been introduced to Doctor Who on television in the First Doctor's final adventure, The Tenth Planet in 1966. But the Cybernetic lifeforms arguably became more associated with the Second Doctor and they encountered him in the comic strips on numerous occasions. The Coming of the Cybermen, which ran from September to October 1967 (and was the first colour Doctor Who strip) was followed by Cyber-appearances in Flower Power, Cyber-Mole, The Cyber Empire and Eskimo Jo. And there were more Cyber-stories in the TV Comic Holiday Special and annual as well!

The Second Doctor bowed out in the comics in The Night Walkers in November 1969. The story tied in nicely

Weekly (later Doctor Who Monthly and Doctor Who Magazine) which launched in 1979. The very first Marvel Doctor Who strip, The Iron Legion (October to December 1979) is rightly remembered as a classic and was created by the dream team of writer Pat Mills, artist Dave Gibbons and editor Dez Skinn (note: the story credits both John Wagner and Pat Mills as writers as they shared the writing credit but took turns writing the scripts). The monsters in this story were an Iron Legion of Robots, led by the evil General Ironicus. The story took place in an alternative reality where the Roman Empire had conquered the galaxy. Another classic story was The Star Beast (February to April 1980) by the same creative team. The monster of this strip, a galactic criminal called Beep the Meep, was actually rather cute with his bat-like ears, but he certainly didn't act cute and enjoyed inflicting pain on others. These two classic adventures will shortly be released as Big Finish audio stories with Tom Baker playing the role of the Doctor as only he can.

The Fifth Doctor had a relatively short innings in the DWM comic strip but

alien creatures ever seen in the Doctor Who strip. The Colin Baker years also saw several appearances of the Cybermen, including in the classic story The World Shapers (August to October 1987) in which it was revealed that the rubbery Voord (a species first seen during the Hartnell era on TV) had evolved into the Cybernetic lifeforms.

John Ridgway also drew several Sylvester McCoy strips including the first Seventh Doctor strip, A Cold Day in Hell (November 1987 to February 1988), which once again saw the return of the Ice Warriors. Another popular Seventh Doctor strip was Nemesis of the Daleks (September to December 1989) written by Steve Alan with art by Lee Sullivan who relished the opportunity to depict the metal meanies from Skaro and later also drew them in Emperor of the Daleks (February to July 1993), written by Paul Cornell. Sullivan was not only able to draw a superb visual depiction of Sylvester McCoy but also had a knack for drawing Daleks that was second to none.

Despite his short run on television, the Eighth Doctor (Paul McGann) enjoyed a



Artwork: John Ridgway (c) Doctor Who Magazine/Panini

respectable run of comic strips in DWM. Children of the Revolution (December 2001 to May 2002) was a memorable story and was a sequel to the Patrick Troughton television story The Evil of the Daleks, featuring the return of the 'humanised' Daleks from that story.

Doctor Who Magazine continued to go from strength to strength in the 2000's and brought us many more classic monster encounters for the Doctor. The Ninth Doctor (Christopher Eccleston) encountered Igrix, (The Love Invasion, April to June 2005), a Kustollen who planned to destroy the moon so that humankind had no staging post to travel deep into space. The David Tennant comic strip era began with Betrothal of Sontar in February/March 2006 when Rose befriended Lerox, a Sontaran who possessed a conscience. Matt Smith's comic strip enemies included the Shasarak, a humanoid species with gravity-shock battle armour (Planet Bollywood, July 2010). More recently, from October to November 2015, Peter Capaldi's Twelfth Doctor encountered vampires in Highgate Cemetery in 1972 in the classic story, The Highgate Horror.

In 2006, a new Doctor Who title burst on to the scene - Doctor Who Adventures. Aimed mainly at younger readers, the magazine was at first published by the Immediate Media Company, with Panini Comics taking over in 2015. The Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Doctors all appeared during the run of the publication and they encountered a memorable run of monsters. The Tenth

Doctor encountered the Disinfectodroids (The Germ War, May 2006), robots which were so obsessive about junk and germs that they cleaned up the Doctor and Rose and dumped them on a planet on the other side of the galaxy! The Eleventh Doctor came across the sinister space leeches (Attack of the Space Leeches, April 2010), green flying creatures which sucked the life out of people and threatened to over-run London until a young boy's common cold was used to overcome them. And the Twelfth Doctor was infected by pollen when he was attacked by the Plant, the entity which controlled all the fauna on the planet Eed'n (Petals, May 2016).

From 2008 to 2013, IDW published a critically acclaimed Doctor Who comic aimed principally at the American market. One of their most memorable titles proved to be a major landmark in comics history - a crossover between Doctor Who and Star Trek: The Next Generation entitled Assimilation! Readers were treated to an alliance between the Cyberman and the Borg - the ultimate monster mash-up! It didn't work out well for the Borg though - the Cybemen betrayed them!

By now, of course, Titan Comics were also on the scene and like DWM and the others, the publisher has brought us a stunning range of Doctor Who comic adventures.

The Tenth Doctor encountered The Wishing Well Witch (April to May 2016), an entity that haunted the town of Dewbury in the early 21st century. The

well in question turned out to be a rupture in time and the witch was in fact the remains of seven Gallifreyan children from the Dark Times of Gallifrey.

The Eleventh Doctor got to meet an entity called ARC (Autonomous Reasoning Center) across several Titan adventures. This shape-shifting entity initially sent the personnel of the Systems Research Base into a coma but went on to travel with the Doctor and his companions Alice and Jones.

Doctor Twelve's Titan adventures have included A Confusion of Angels (December 2017 to January 2018), a rollercoaster of a story featuring the Doctor, Bill Potts, Nardole and Missy as well as the return of

some classic new series monsters - the rhino-like Judoon, the Weeping Angels and the Heavenly Hosts (previously seen in the David Tennant Christmas special Voyage of the Damned). And in the brilliantly surreal festive adventure Relative Dimensions (December 2015), the Doctor and Clara encountered giant nutcrackers, snakes and other creations of the Doctor's old enemy, the Celestial Toymaker. And by the time you read this, the 13th Doctor will be encountering a new generation of nasties!

There have also been monster encounters for the Doctor in Battles from Time (a magazine published to support a range of collectable trading cards and the BBC Doctor Who annuals. The range of stories is frankly mind-boggling and the one thing we can be sure of is that the Doctor will continue to fight the monsters for many years to come!

.....

MONSTER MAKER!

Cybermen, Ice Warriors, Draconians - John Ridgway has drawn them all! Doctor Who Magazine artist for the whole of the Colin Baker years and much of the Sylvester McCoy era, he has also worked on such classics as Transformers, Judge Dredd and Commando.

Were there any particular comics or comic artists that you admired when you were growing up?

There were many different artists at different stages of growing up. The first was probably Burne Hogarth, drawing

Tarzan (which appeared in Tarzan Adventures). I think his signed work indicated to me that there were actually people drawing comics. Mac Raboy on Captain Marvel Jnr. Frank Hampson, Frank Bellamy, Sydney Jordan, Alden McWilliams, Arturo Del Castillo, Wayne Boring on Superman. There were many, many others.

You drew the whole of the Sixth Doctor's comic strip era, a rare achievement and one to be proud of. What are your thoughts about that period of your career when you look back now?

I enjoyed the whole of it. Together with Enid Blyton's Famous Five comic it allowed me to become a full-time artist. Previously I had been drawing Commando and, later, stories for Warrior magazine in my spare time while working full-time designing ventilation schemes, submarine escape suits, and hospital incinerators. The main challenge for me on Doctor Who was getting the faces to look right - and drawing Peri (Commando gave me little experience in drawing attractive females).

Frobisher is one of the most popular characters you've drawn. Did it take you a long time to get the look of the character right (in his penguin form) or was it something that developed very naturally from the script?

I started out drawing Frobisher as realistically possible, from photos of King Penguins, but real penguins have very little by way of facial expression, so Frobisher gradually morphed into a cartoonish character helped by drawing a Rupert-the-Bear type story section. Steve Parkhouse was a brilliant writer to work with.

Another brilliant character was Dr Ivan Asimoff in Polly the Glot - was that a character you particularly enjoyed drawing?

I think Asimoff was created by Dave Gibbons. I asked Steve Parkhouse for a story featuring Zyglots and he wrote the story around Asimoff fighting to save them from extermination. I enjoyed drawing Asimoff's love for Polly and his determination on the Akker's ship. There was a surprising depth of feeling in most of the Doctor Who stories I drew.

Is there a Doctor Who monster you enjoy drawing the most? You do seem to have a particular skill at drawing both Cybermen and Ice Warriors!

I enjoyed drawing the Draconians most. They were dramatic and stylish. The Cybermen were interesting but the detail on their heads was laborious to get right.

Was it fun drawing hybrid Voord / Cybermen in The World Shapers?

Sadly, that story was drawn at a time when I was also drawing Hellblazer and being asked to catch up on the Hellblazer schedule. I could not continue to draw both Hellblazer and Doctor Who. Hearing that Sheila Cranna, the editor of Doctor Who Magazine, was fighting to keep the magazine going (Colin Baker was fighting to keep the programme on TV) and knowing that Marvel UK had sold off Starburst (its only other magazine), I made the decision to give up Doctor Who (I was not sacked as has been suggested). While I enjoyed working with my friend Tim Perkins as inker, I felt rushed and could not do my best work.

You contributed to Prisoners of Time, a mini-series from IDW to celebrate 50 years of Doctor Who. What are your thoughts about working on that?

I thoroughly enjoyed drawing the story and now know how to get out of a strait-jacket - a necessary skill for people in the comics business. It was good to draw Colin as the Doctor, Peri, and Frobisher. It also gave me a chance to draw The Master. The mini-series was also published by Panini in Germany and I got the chance to meet Colin again and make

some new friends over there.

You've done a lot of science-fiction, such as Doctor Who and Dan Dare, but lots of historical stuff as well. Do you have favourite between the two genres?

I like fantasy and science fiction. Really, I regard Doctor Who as fantasy. Science fiction, for me, is difficult because I want to get the science accurate and correct. With fantasy you can let your imagination rip. Historical stuff requires a lot of research and reference material.

Would you like to work on Doctor Who regularly again?

Not regularly. I would love to draw another story. These days it is in full colour and I would want to do the whole job - pencils, inks and colour. That would be too time-consuming to do on a regular basis.

What are you working on at the moment?

I regard myself as semi-retired. I'm colouring old Space Ace strips by Ron Turner, which should keep me going busy for a couple of years. I've also decided to colour and complete the first story arc of Age of Heroes by Jim Hudnell and there may be a chance of getting that published. If that happens and is successful, Jim and I will probably carry on with further story arcs. If not, I want to get on with my own sci-fi series, "Frontiers", Melvin, Darrak, Alternate Earth and Helven. I'll be busy into my nineties.



Artwork: John Ridgway (c) Doctor Who Magazine/Panini

Author: Ian Wheeler
Twitter: @ianwheeler_who

WAR HAS BEGUN!



Photo by Sara Jo West

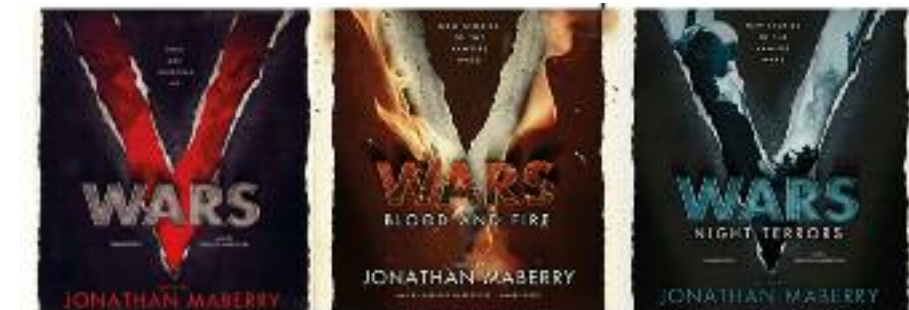
Leah Crowley talks to prolific New York Times best-selling author and comic writer, **Jonathan Maberry**: His origins and interests, the Joe Ledger series, The Wolfman, upcoming spinoff series, Lost Roads and the forthcoming Netflix adaptation, V-Wars. She also finds out what motivates him and gets a glimpse of what's to come in the near future.

Leah Crowley: You have quite an extensive back catalogue, ranging from comic books to best-selling novels and a forthcoming televised adaptation. You're obviously very passionate about your work and creative projects. When you're not sitting at your writing desk do you have another strong passion and interest?

Jonathan Maberry: Even though I'm busy I'm not ankle-chained to my desk. My wife and I travel quite a lot, and I have a great deal of interest in the arts -music, dance, live theater, and film. Also, I've been a martial arts practitioner and teacher for over fifty years, and although I'm retired from actively teaching jujutsu and kenjutsu, I do solo training on the bluffs her in Southern California.

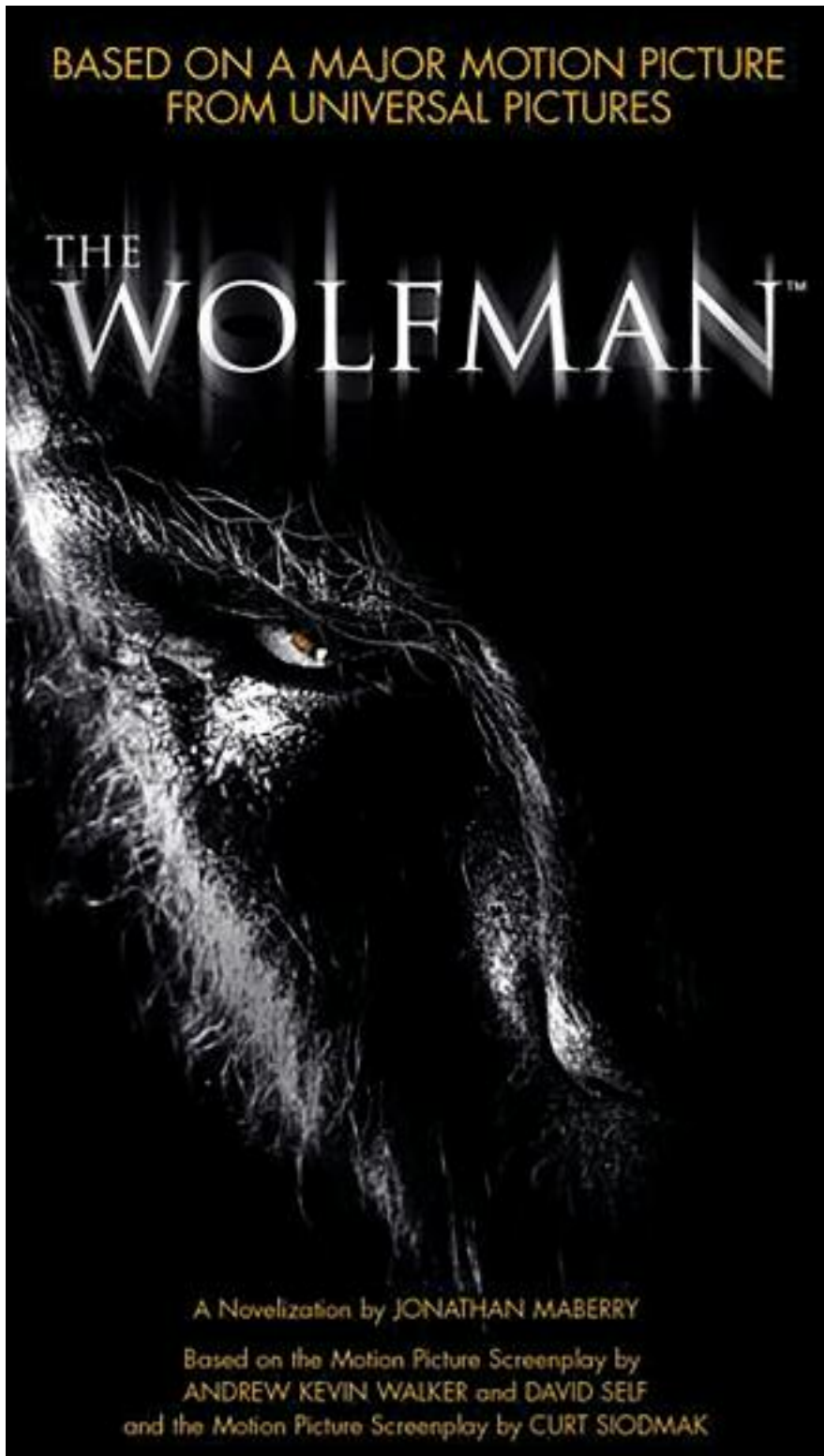
Leah Crowley: V-Wars has been published in a series of books, graphic novels, board game and now the V-Wars legacy continues with a televised adaptation for a new Netflix series. How has this whole experience been for you so far and what was it like to meet the team and cast?

Jonathan Maberry: V-Wars started out as a fun experiment to blend my love of science and my deep interest in the folklore of supernatural predators. I had asked by the editors at IDW Publishing to come up with an idea for an anthology and thought it would be fun to do a



shared world story. The conceit is that melting permafrost (due to climate change) releases an ancient disease that triggers a dormant gene, which in turn codes for a genetic disorder approximating vampirism. It's straight

science fiction with no actual supernatural elements. I created the concept and wrote an extensive framing story, then invited some of my colleagues to write 'field reports' from the 'vampire wars'. Between the volumes of the



anthology series I wrote a series of comic books, which have since been gathered into trades (graphic novel collections).

When IDW formed its Entertainment division and announced that they were going to shop V-Wars as a possible TV series I was delighted, but not really optimistic. I've had other works under

option before and, in typical Hollywood fashion, there was a lot of smoke but no actual fire. And then...bang!...I get a call from my producer informing me that Netflix has bought the series and hired Ian Somerhalder (Lost, The Vampire Diaries) to star. Everything since has been somewhat surreal. Reading the scripts, meeting the actors at the table read,

going to the set for the start of filming, and now watching the dailies on my computer. It's both magical and crazy.

Leah Crowley: *You're recently working on a second Rot & Ruin spin-off, entitled Lost Roads. What can readers expect from this?*

Jonathan Maberry: Lost Roads is the second of a new spinoff series that launched with Broken Lands. It's set six months after the events of Fire & Ash, and although many of the original characters are in the new books, the focus has shifted. The new main character is a fifteen-year-old bisexual Latina living in South Texas, in what had once been a relocation camp for undocumented immigrants. Gabriella 'Gutsy' Gomez is a strong-willed, deeply practical and very courageous young woman who is trying to solve the mysterious death of her mother. Each layer she peels back reveals more about her mother's death, the town in which she lives, and the nature of the zombie plague that destroyed the world. This is a classic example of when the truth does not set you free. It's a great jumping on place for new readers, though for long-time readers of my books you'll encounter more than one familiar face.

Leah Crowley: *Back in 2010 you also wrote a movie novelisation of the film, The Wolfman. The novel also achieved success as a New York Times bestseller and it also won the Scribe Award for 'Best Film Adaptation'. There have been many classic horror related films over the years but what inspired you to write, The Wolfman, in particular?*

Jonathan Maberry: I've always been a fan of classic horror books, comics, TV, and movies; and werewolves have been as important to me as vampires and zombies; however it wasn't my love of the Wolfman that connected me to the project. I was at home one night and received a call out of the blue from the vice-president of licensing for Universal Pictures. She said they were doing a remake of The Wolfman and asked if I might be interested in tackling the novelization.

I had no idea how that process worked, though I agree to give it a try. What I



learned was that the authors of movie adaptations don't actually get to see the film. They work directly from the script and maybe (if they're lucky) see a few production stills or drawings. So, in the absence of more concrete material to use as a foundation, I did a lot of research and decided to write an actual Gothic novel. The book did rather well for me, and help reconnect me with the world of classic monsters.

Leah Crowley: *You've wrote numerous comics, starting with Marvel Entertainment and later with Dark Horse and IDW Publishing. Your works have included, Wolverine, Black Panther, The Punisher, Captain America and V-Wars. Have you ever considered working and being involved with other comic publishers, such as, DC Comics, Rebellion Publishers, etc...*

Jonathan Maberry: I am already in discussions about a possible project for DC but can't spill the beans right now. As for Rebellion, I absolutely love 2000AD, Dredd, and a number of other titles. Terrific and consistently entertaining and innovative books. However I don't actually know anyone at Rebellion had don't think I'm currently on their radar. That may change, though.

Leah Crowley: *Favourite superhero and villain? Why?*

Jonathan Maberry: My favourite super hero is T'Challa, the Black Panther. He was introduced in the pages of Fantastic Four shortly before I began reading comics, way back in the middle

1960s. The character was groundbreaking for me, because I was raised in a very poor and intensely violent home by a father who was a criminal a member of the local chapter of the KKK. Not the most nurturing of environments. My only influences were hatred and intolerance. But then I read about the Black Panther in the comics and that started a series of conversations with friends and, more importantly, teachers and librarians. It was because of that character that I learned the truth about apartheid, diversity, Jim Crow, the Selma March, and more. Heartbreaking, but then the truth often is. Without exposure to T'Challa, I can't say for certain that I would have become the person I am. And the fact that the universe was clever enough to put me in position to then write the Black Panther comic many years later is delightful. I'm sure my father is spinning in his grave at high speed.

Favorite villain is, and will always be, Doctor Doom. But I'm talking Old School Doom, from the Lee and Kirby days of the mid-to-late 1960s. This was the doom who wasn't a raving lunatic, and he wasn't introduced to a story to get beat up just to prove how tough or resourceful the hero was. Old school Doom was brilliant, subtle, and nuanced. That was the version of Doom I used when I wrote Black Panther: DoomWar, and in Marvel Universe vs The Avengers.

Leah Crowley: *In 2009, Patient Zero was released which formed the Joe Ledger series. Since then the series has grown into further novels, short stories and a couple of collections, including, Unstoppable, an anthology of Joe Ledger stories told by some of today's top mystery writers such as, Christopher Golden, Joe Mckinney. Can you tell readers more about the character, Joe Ledger and what they can expect from this inspiring series?*

Jonathan Maberry: Joe Ledger is a former cop who gets recruited into a secret government agency tasked with going up against terrorists who use cutting edge science. Joe is a bit crazy (or, possibly, very crazy), but he is the perfect man for the job. The first story, Patient Zero, pits him against a group that has weaponized a prion disease to create an unstoppable zombie-like plague. The series is a lot of fun to write -high concepts, lots of action, and the opportunity for me to mix a lot of humor in with the thrills and chills.

Leah Crowley: *As previously mentioned, V-Wars is currently in production featuring a star-studded cast. Will there be a possibility of seeing more adaptations of your work on the small screen in the future?*

Jonathan Maberry: Several of my other works are under option, including the Joe Ledger thrillers (in development by SONY) and my standalone science fiction novel, Mars One. And, coincidentally, the day I'm doing this interview another of my projects was optioned by a Canadian TV group—but details on that are under wraps.

Leah Crowley: *Your stories are highly entertaining and visual. Can you briefly describe the comic writing process as to writing a novel?*

Jonathan Maberry: Novels are all about the writers alone in a room. It's solitary and it takes a long time. In a weird way the

writer becomes the god of the universe that is the book. Comics, on the other hand, are much more collaborative. The writer is either assigned a gig or pitches something to an editor, then there are discussions about how the story should play out. Usually an artist is picked early on, and the writer has to take into account that artist's unique visual storytelling style because it will influence how he writes. Then the writer does the script, a process that takes a few days to a week. After that it's turfed back to the editor for notes, then sent to the artist for pencil sketches. There is discussion at every step. Following the pencils are the inks, the colors and the lettering. Each step brings in another professional, so there is a lot of say on how the comic should look. And even though the writer decides on how many panels and gives detailed art direction, he's wise to listen to the artist and even the inker on modifications. So, although both novels and comics involve telling stories, they are very different. And each is fun in its own way.

Leah Crowley: *You are also a prolific editor of many literary titles. Have you ever had a special moment from editing another writer's work and it blew you away? What do you look for in a well-written story?*

Jonathan Maberry: I am frequently blown away by the quality of writing that comes from the authors whose work I am fortunate to edit. I only work on projects

where I get to hand-pick my contributors, so I already know their merits going in, but then I see their finished products. I recently got a fantastic short story from RL Stine (Goosebumps) for a middle grade anthology I'm editing -New Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark; and the Hippo stories Scott Sigler wrote for two different volumes of V-Wars are among the best horror stories I've ever read. Weston Ochse's short for Joe Ledger: Unstoppable made me cry.

Leah Crowley: *Most writers usually have a ritual, such as, music being played in the background or complete silence. Do you have a specific routine when you write?*

Jonathan Maberry: I don't have many rituals. I'm not temperamental in any way. I write eight hours each day, often broken into two four-hour blocks with an exercise break in the middle. Sometimes I have music playing, other times not. That said, I have some fun creating playlists for certain novels. And when I do listen to music, there are certain artists whose works are in heavier rotation -Tom Waits, Leonard Cohen, Steely Dan, Bob Dylan and Pink Floyd, for example. And...coffee usually factors into my writing day. Quite a lot, actually.

Leah Crowley: *This October, Audible listeners will get to hear an all new original ghost story, Lullaby, narrated by Scott Brick, and will be exclusively for Audible. What can listeners expect from this Halloween Treat?*

Jonathan Maberry: With short stories it's hard to spill details without also spilling the beans. So, I'll just say this much: it's a scary little ghost story that will not be remembered as the 'feel good' story of the year.

Leah Crowley: *What is next from the mind of Jonathan Maberry?*

Jonathan Maberry: I'm currently writing Lost Roads, which I expect to finish in a month. After that I have another stand along -Ink, which is about a kind of vampire who steals tattoos tied to people's most precious memories, leaving

behind only the knowledge that something vastly important has been taken. Then I write Rage, the first in a new Joe Ledger series, where he transitions from an American troubleshooter to a more global problem solver.

Leah Crowley: *Some comic writers and artists have been inspired from comics from their childhood. Did the same thing happen to you? When was the first time you've read a comic and what did it mean to you?*

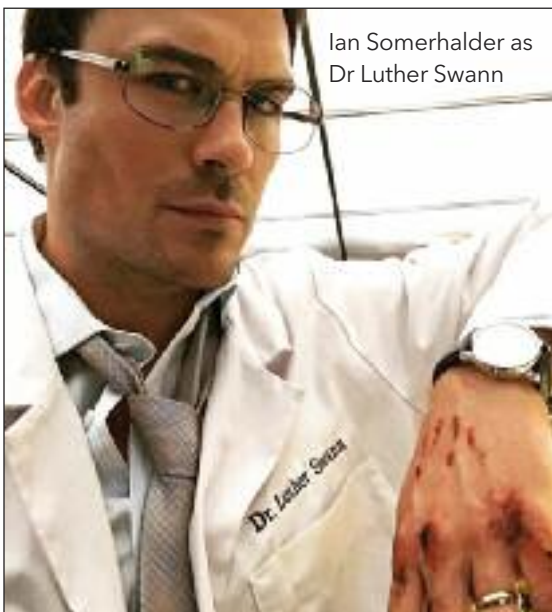
Jonathan Maberry: I got into comics very early, and the first one I ever bought was Fantastic Four #66, back in 1967. I was hooked right away and became an instant 'Marvel kid'. The blend of science fiction, character development, and action suited me; and the strong sense of moral values and courage gave me life lessons I was not learning at home. Plus that series introduced the Black Panther. So critical to my formation.

Leah Crowley: *In the news recently there have been mixed views towards Ruby Rose taking on the role as Batwoman and some critics said she wasn't gay enough to perform the role. From a writer's perspective and a comic writer's perspective what are your thoughts in relation to this?*

Jonathan Maberry: It's long past time for us to treat LGBTQ as if it's something new. It isn't. There should already be characters of all genders, all identities throughout pop culture, as there is in real life. As for Ruby Rose not being gay enough...that is beyond insulting. She is gay. She is openly gender fluid. Are critics saying that she has to be some kind of cliché gay in order to be acceptable? That's patently absurd. Gay comes in all shapes and sizes, just like straight does. It's called 'being who you are'. I'm a straight guy and I know this... how does anyone not know it?

Leah Crowley: *You have travelled to and appeared at numerous conventions and events over the years. Is there a destination still on your bucket list?*

Jonathan Maberry: I haven't yet been to Asia, so that's on my list. And my last trip to the UK, though wonderful, was way too short. I need to go back and to spend a whole lot more time there.



Ian Somerhalder as Dr Luther Swann

HAMMER TIME

How it should have been... The unseen HoH #24



Somewhat messily, this title ended in August 1978, one issue short of completing volume two (when the original publishers chose to invest in home videos instead of print).

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Mid-1976. Dez Skinn is preparing the first issue of horror-themed publication The House of Hammer. The central element of this innovative blend of magazine feature and comic strip is intended to be a regular comics adaptation of an entire Hammer horror movie. However, Skinn is seriously handicapped by the fact of operating in an age before videos and DVDs. He has chosen Dracula (1958) as the first adaptation simply because of its providential broadcast on television. Moreover, he can capture the transmission only on an audio cassette. "And then [I got] my typewriter out," he recalls, "Pause, replay, 'What was that word?'" This inauspicious beginning, however, heralded a publication that would constitute a high-water mark in the comics medium - one that few creatives have bettered even when unafflicted by the pathetic technological exigencies of the 1970s.

After recently defecting from IPC, Skinn was the newly appointed head of the youth group at Williams Publishing. His jobs were essentially Anglicisation (the UK edition of Mad), reprinting (the licensed comics Tarzan, Korak and Laurel & Hardy) and cover approval (the saucy Funny Half Hour, packaged elsewhere). With Williams actively seeking to make his department bigger, Skinn seized the opportunity to create a product that was more personally fulfilling. "I guess a bit of it was self-indulgence," Skinn concedes. "Having been a horror fan and a comics fan, it would be lovely if I could earn a crust out of doing what I love. But I think I could justify putting both elements in."

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Dez Skinn, who had dropped Monster Mag to create House of Hammer and all the rest, has returned to his roots to produce lavish, high quality, full size (9.5 x 13") issues of this ground-breaking title, each with a huge 3ft x 2ft poster.

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In an era with no easy means to re-experience a motion picture, there certainly existed a market for printed retellings of movies, but Skinn disdained pre-existing models like 'film books' (stills accompanied by text) and photo strips ('fumetti'). "I just thought, 'Christopher Lee standing in an open window would not have his Dracula cape furling behind him like Superman - it will look limp. But I can get an artist to make it look far more dramatic.'" Skinn felt his mooted hybrid publication could bring in comics fans, "providing the artwork was world class. There's no point doing it on the cheap." In the costing he prepared for his bosses, Skinn deliberately ensured an unusually high 30p cover price that would enable the hiring of top talent.

No sooner had his costing and dummy secured him a green light than Skinn was hit by a brainwave that would change the title and, to a large extent, the content of what was then called Chiller. A few doors down from Williams' London Wardour Street HQ was the home of Hammer Films, a company synonymous with horror movies via a string of genre classics like The Brides of Dracula, The Curse of Frankenstein and The Devil Rides Out. Skinn's tie-in idea was blessed by serendipity when Hammer's script editor Chris Wicking turned out to be an admirer of Fantasy Advertiser, one of the numerous fanzines Skinn had previously published.

Focusing on one company's wares might sound restrictive, but Skinn says, "Their back catalogue alone could keep me afloat for decades." He adds, "I wasn't intending just to adapt existing work," pointing out the magazine's 'further adventures' of Hammer characters Captain Kronos and Father Shandor. Moreover, while Van Helsing's Terror Tales deployed the titular vampire hunter in his Hammer Peter Cushing

likeness, it was so as to introduce shock-ending short strips essentially unrelated to the film studio. In any case, Skinn by necessity ended up "producing a genre magazine, not a house magazine." He explains, "We couldn't fill 52 pages with stuff about Hammer every issue because there wasn't the product coming up."

The debut issue of the renamed The House of Hammer - indicia-dated October 1976 - got things off to a slightly shaky start. There wasn't much wrong with Paul Neary's stylish artwork on the Dracula adaptation, nor even the infrequent writer Skinn's script ("I did the adaptation of the first one simply because it was new and untested: would it fit in fifteen pages?"). The aforementioned agonisingly slow transcription method dictated by the era's technology was one problem. Skinn created another when he chose Joe Petagno as cover artist. The latter's gauche rendering of Dracula turned out to be less impressive than his album-sleeve art for the likes of The Kinks and Pink Floyd. "I was lured more by his reputation than by the quality of his work," Skinn admits.

In the future, celebrated talents like Chris Lowder, Steve Moore and Steve Parkhouse would all write strips for HoH (highly useful initials, as they can signify any of the different titles the publication would eventually have). "Most of my team, excluding artists, were from IPC," Skinn says. "The designers, the layout people, the writers, the letterers. We were the frustrated band of people who believed the medium could do more. So when I had the good fortune to get this job, I brought them all along." In terms of text features, Skinn points out that with few exceptions he employed writers who were published authors. "That gave a certain class to the magazine."

In the main, though, it was its artwork that would make HoH iconic. Skinn usually steered clear of 'clean' artists. "Joe Colquhoun worked because he's a brush artist so it's all very messy. Ditto Martin Asbury, Jim Baikie..." That notwithstanding, Skinn admits that clean-line man Brian Bolland provided a high point with his adaptation of Vampire Circus. "Different styles - that was the main thing. I loved variety." Meanwhile, Van Helsing's Terror Tales were "an opportunity to try out new contributors or give work to people who were established but had downtime."

The two artists with whom HoH became synonymous were John Bolton and Brian Lewis. Skinn: "John was new and young and maybe unsure of himself. He did lots of character sketches before he would even commit to put things down on the drawing board." Lewis, on the other hand, was a "busy man" who had been "going for decades." Skinn describes Lewis as "my go-to guy, whether it was for a comic strip or a cover." Bolton's moody, cinematic artwork on Dracula Prince of Darkness in issue six was so impressive that Hammer head Michael Carreras told Skinn it visually topped the adapted film. Meanwhile, Lewis' adroit exploitation of the colour that front covers afforded led Carreras to comment that the results were better than the relevant film posters.

Happily, audio taping off TV proved a one-off when Hammer began furnishing scripts. HoH weren't always presenting the version of films that ended up on the screen, though, because the scripts sometimes lacked the 'pink pages' that denoted last-minute changes. "We had quite a few things in our version of Vampire Circus that weren't in the film," Skinn admits, before - perhaps rather desperately - offering, "But what a thrill for those who've seen it: 'Wow, here's the bits that were never filmed.'"

Eventually Hammer started taking HoH seriously enough to let them take away film cannisters, while Warner Brothers - ultimate owners of Williams - were impressed enough to let the magazine use their screening suites. Despite said rooms' useful pause-and-replay facilities, science hadn't yet proffered pens with lights. "I remember distinctly artists sitting there scribbling in the dark," Skinn smiles.

How It all began... DOCTOR WHO WEEKLY #0



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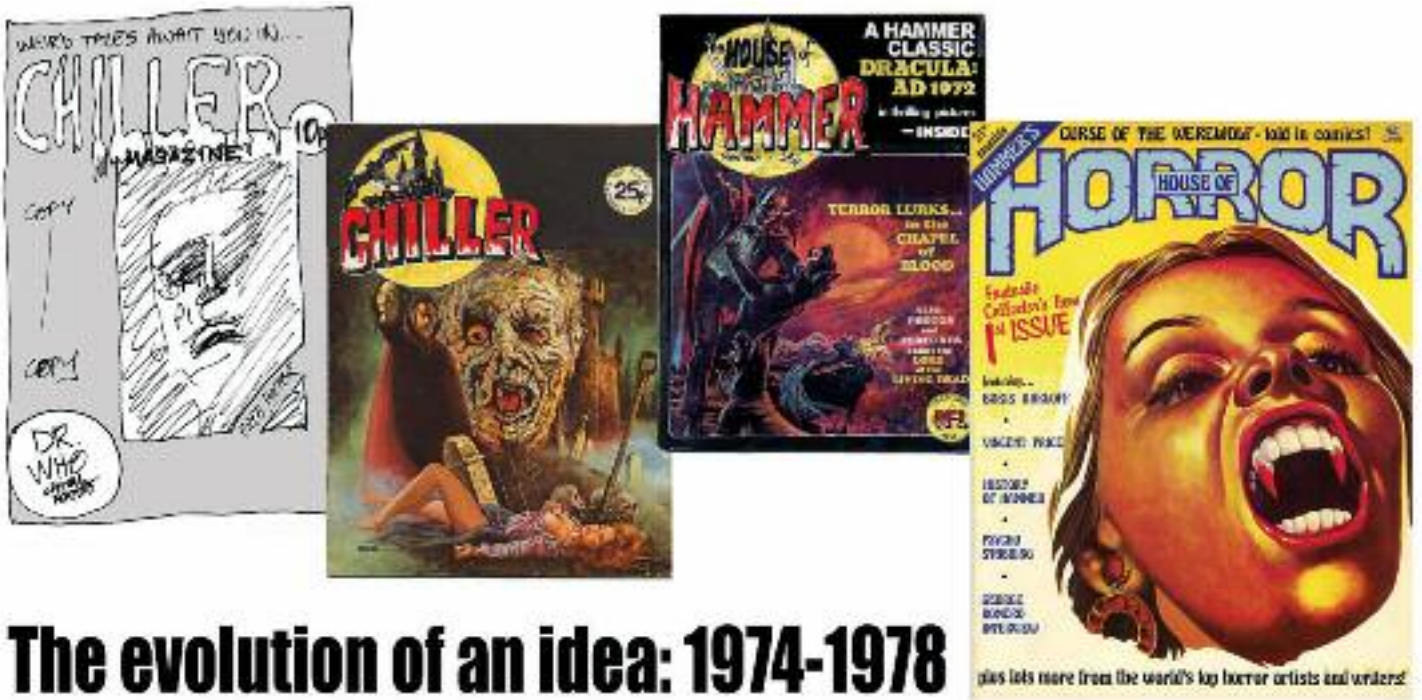
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"Dez's latest House Of Hammer has outsold everything else we do on a sales-to-print run."



The evolution of an idea: 1974-1978

The juncture at which HoH started that process of being taken seriously was issue four. The edition featured an adaptation of *The Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires*, a 1974 picture in which Hammer shamelessly sought to hitch horror to the kung fu bandwagon. Skinn admits it to be "a serious Marmite movie." Additionally, the pessimistic sales director had just dictated that the publication's frequency be reduced from monthly to bi-monthly. However, at the regular presentation to the directors following that issue, Skinn recalls, "The sales director said, 'Well, Dez's latest House of Hammer has outsold everything else we do on a sales-to-print run.'" This meant that HoH had bested not just Williams' youth-group titles but its very lucrative line of adults-only magazines. "Suddenly I was the blue-eyed boy."

On the surface, HoH's success was a mystery. Its readership, Skinn notes, "were not old enough to see the films, couldn't stay up late enough to watch them on TV." Skinn has an answer to this riddle: "Forbidden fruit... I was presenting X-certificate films to an under-18 audience."

With #9, HoH regained its monthly status. That the magazine climbed to a UK circulation of 35,000 was an endorsement of Skinn's wide interpretation of his brief. As well as expected Hammer adaptations like *The Plague of the Zombies*, HoH tackled sci-fi flick *Moon Zero Two* and dialogue-free dinosaur pic *One Million Years B.C.*, in both cases managing to turn dubious cinematic experiences into elegant comicology.

From #19, the print run leapt by 200,000 copies after a deal was offered by an

American distributor. The sole compromise required was a tweak of a title that Curtis Circulation Company thought made it sound like a DIY magazine. Hammer's House of Horror quickly gave way to another retitling, Hammer's Halls of Horror, when Jim Warren - anxious about the competition that the new import would pose to his Famous Monsters of Filmland - copyrighted the first choice. Either way, slavish fidelity to the original logo design possibly ensured that some never noticed the name change. Moreover, it was probably all for the best. It's a startling fact that the last-ever Hammer horror film appeared in the very year that HoH started. "Hammer didn't mean as much as it used to," observes Skinn.

With issue #23, however, the success juggernaut came to a shuddering halt. Having only recently acquired the Williams line, WH Allen elected to close it down. "The owners decided that they would put their money into videos." Skinn was informed of this by production director Ron Letchford. "He grabbed the rights to Mad. Nobody else wanted House of Hammer, so I bought the rights to that." Amazingly, in his spare time Skinn had launched a new science fiction magazine, *Starburst*, in late 1977. "I used the entire budget for *Starburst* 4 to buy the rights and the sales returns of House of Hammer. So suddenly I'd got the only two genre magazines in the country, but I'd got no money to do either of them."

Skinn's potential bankruptcy was averted by Stan Lee. "Stan wanted me to turn Marvel UK around, 'cos it was losing money." Skinn's bacon might have been saved, but HoH had to be sacrificed. "Am I a tart? You can only do so much."

Skinn did eventually revive Halls of Horror, continuing the numbering in 1982 under his Quality Communications imprint. The editor was now Dave Reeder, but the magazine featured much the same format and creative talent. However, it lasted just six issues. "Things had moved on," Skinn reflects. The 'forbidden fruit' aspect had somewhat diminished, HoH's shadow-draped monochrome was competing with the full-colour bloodfest of *Fanogria* and the 'video nasties' scandal had scared off many potential outlets. Moreover, horror involving creaky coaches and buxom wenches had shrivelled like a vampire exposed to sunlight. "It was all slasher movies."

HoH is a fond memory for the fifty-somethings who bought it in their teens. Its comics legacy, though, is not just nostalgia-based. Its high aesthetic qualities aside, the publication was responsible for more than one genre innovation. Through HoH, Skinn made the names of artists and writers famous outside industry offices. "I was possibly the first one to actually give credits in print in comic strips in this country," he proudly says.

Even more importantly, as a consequence of the sophisticated comics fare he proffered in HoH, Skinn succeeded in his ambition to cause the medium to "do more." While British comics publishers shifted a quarter-million of their biggest-selling titles every week, it was a time-limited success. "They lost them all when they got to be twelve, thirteen, fourteen," Skinn says. "My audience for House of Hammer was older than Action or Warlord. I managed to capture that audience that had evaded IPC and DC Thomson for so long: those who felt they'd grown out of comics."

Readers wanting to know more about HoH are referred to:
<http://dezskinn.com/warner-williams-2/>

Author: Sean Egan
 Images: (c) Dez Skinn/Quality Communications, 2018

Realm of the Damned

Interview

Werewolf Press's Black Metal horror graphic novel *Realm Of The Damned: Tenebris Deos* came out back in summer 2016 to some acclaim. Now two years later, **writer Alec Worley and artist Pye Parr** have reteamed to create another volume in the *Realm of The Damned* series. **Joel Meadows** spoke to them to find out more about this second book...



Joel Meadows: How different was it writing the second *Realm of The Damned* compared with writing the first book?

Alec Worley: Way harder. Not only in terms of historical research, but also trying to fit something into the framework we'd already laid out in the first book. We had to go deeper on the characters too. Whereas the first one was like this Bronze Age-style monster mash-up book, this one had to go into the main character's motivations for doing the awful things she does. On the other hand, we've had a lot more freedom in terms of invention. From the get-go, we wanted to make this much more surreal in terms of horror.

JM: You are working with Pye Parr again. Now you have worked on a sizeable project together, is there more of a rapport than there was with the first book?

AW: Working with Pye on these books is the closest I've ever worked with an artist, and it only benefits the book, I think. We look over each other's work and spot each other's mistakes, which helps keep the whole thing as tight as possible in terms of words and pictures. When you're writing full script and just sending it off into the void, there's so much in terms of nuance of storytelling that can risk getting lost. But not when you've got a close creative partnership like we have here. It helps that we're both into the same kind of nonsense and both play off each other.

JM: *Signum Draconis* is a prequel to *Tenebris Deos*. What challenges did that throw up for you with this project?

AW: It was tough maintaining that crazy operatic tone that a story like this needs. We wanted the kind of exuberance you find in European rather than Western comics. It's easy to go completely off-the-wall - and we wanted to do that - but we also needed it to be grounded enough to convey Athena's story: a woman going to insane extremes for reasons even she's not fully aware of.

Tripwire: How different was your approach to drawing the second *Realm of The Damned* compared with illustrating the first book?

Pye Parr: The main difference was technical - I forced myself to learn Clip Studio paint by throwing myself in at the deep end and inking/colouring the whole book in it, which slowed me down ridiculously at the start, but I'm glad I persevered as I find it much better than Photoshop for linework and stuff. It's almost all I use now (although Photoshop is still good for techy stuff at the end). As a result, the art style has probably changed a little from the first book, (there's still buckets of blood and lots of black!) but it's a lot more 'drawn' somehow, as opposed to big blocks of scribbly stuff - which looked quite cool - but was as much me finding a technique to hide the limitations of the brush tools (or maybe my own limitations if i'm being honest) in Photoshop as anything else!

TW: You are working with Alec Worley again. Now you have worked on a sizeable project together, is there more of a rapport than there was with the first book?

PP: The same, we've got on really well right from the start, to the point where half the time I phone him up just to talk absolute shite for an hour on the pretext of a very minor script query. I think it's important for you both to have a bit of back and forth about each others work. Make it as much of a collaboration as possible.

TW: Can you give us the one line elevator pitch for *Realm of The Damned Signum Draconis*?

PP: It's an unhinged medieval monster bloodbath, where the only character who isn't an absolute nutjob gets squashed by a flying horse about 5 pages after he's introduced.

TW: *Signum Draconis* is a prequel to *Tenebris Deos*. What challenges did that throw up for you with this project?

PP: Haha, those are all Alec's problems. He's a methodical researcher, so i get lots of great reference work done for me. That said, I am sometime stuck with stuff I drew from the first book that I cant deviate too much from, even if I've had a better idea since. It was fun to flesh out the character of Athena though.

TW: How much visual historical research did you need to carry out for the second book?

PP: As I mentioned above, Alec is really good at that, so he did a lot of the prep work. We have a shared Pinterest folder where we spam ideas and reference for each scene or character with each other which is really useful. That way we can show each other what we're thinking of without tons of email links and crap floating about. I'm pretty sure anyone who knows what they're looking at will be absolutely screwing at the mess I've made of the armour and swords and stuff, but man, 75% of the people in the book aren't even human, so that doesn't bother me too much...

JM: Can you give us the one line elevator pitch for *Realm of The Damned Signum Draconis*?

AW: Medieval vampire warlord Athena Petrova must strike a dark bargain in order to save her beloved Transylvania. Blood. Blasphemy. Battles. Madness. Monsters. Metal.

Realm Of The Damned:
Signum Draconis is out now
from Werewolf Press



Welcome to the first Tripwire Presents TV and Film section of Comic Scene UK. Each issue we shall be offering the best in TV and film coverage in the pages of the magazine. We kick off with a roundup of the massive New York Comic Con, which took place in October of this year...

The Empire State Strikes Back



We have been attending New York Comic Con since it started way back in 2006 and it has certainly evolved and changed. 2018 is its thirteenth year and the show is almost unrecognisable from when it started.

New York Comic Con runs for four days and this year it took place from 4 to 7 October. When it began all those years ago, the action only happened at the Jacob K Javits Convention Center

Pictures clockwise from top: crowds descend on the Javits Center; a fan poses with a full-sized Lego Aquaman at the DC booth and the *American Gods* lunch counter from the Starz show in the Starz tent at the show. Pics: Joel Meadows

in New York. But these days, and for the last few years, it has outgrown the Javits, so events has moved offsite. As well as the Javits, panels and events take place at the Hammerstein Ballroom at the Manhattan Center and the Hulu Theater at the iconic Madison Square Gardens.

For fans of comics as well as those who love genre TV, New York Comic Con has got everything. At this year's show in October, shows like *American Gods*, *Good Omens*, *Deadly Class*, *Outlander*, *Star Trek Discovery*, *Doctor Who* and movers and shakers in the





Pictures clockwise from top: The IDW booth at the show; crowds in the main area at the Javits Center; British comic creator Mike Perkins (*Green Lantern*) and cosplayers dressed as the movie Flash and Raven from the Teen Titans.
Pics: Joel Meadows

worlds of genre TV and film like Neil Gaiman (*American Gods*, *Good Omens*) Jodie Whittaker (*Doctor Who*), Taiki Waititi (*Thor: Ragnarok*), Oscar winner Guillermo del Toro and voice legend Phil LaMarr were all present and represented. Comics itself was also very visible with the likes of legend Frank Miller (*Dark Knight*), current *Superman* writer Brian Michael Bendis, legendary artist and illustrator Bill Sienkiewicz and *Hellboy* creator Mike Mignola were all on hand at the show too sometime over the four days.

Publishers were well-represented too as ever. DC, Marvel, IDW, Boom!, Dark Horse, Image, AfterShock, Valiant and

“In thirteen years, New York Comic Con has gone from a young pretender to rival or possibly even exceed the sort of numbers that San Diego Comic-Con attracts.”

LionForge were all set up at the show as were a whole host of other exhibitors including Alex Ross Art, Funko, Abrams, Starz and many more.

In thirteen years, New York Comic Con has gone from a young pretender to rival or possibly even exceed (even though we can't confirm this) the sort

of numbers that San Diego Comic-Con, which has been running for 49 years, attracts.

New York City has been the home of US comics for decades now and even though DC no longer has an office there, it still feels like this is the case and New York Comic-Con is a yearly celebration of this fact. TV and Film are a part of the comics industry now and have been for quite some time now so it is only correct that this show reflects that. It is still very much about comics at its core and that is a very impressive thing. Long may it continue.

New York Comic Con 2019 will be on 3 to 6 October 2019.



HAPPY 15TH BIRTHDAY THE WALKING DEAD



The Walking Dead was launched by Image back in 2003 and so we take a look back at this important series in its anniversary year, with two major television shows spinning out of the comic series...

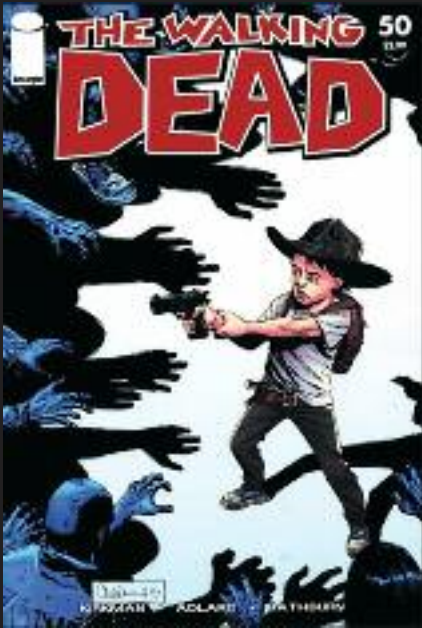
The Walking Dead launched with its first issue back in 2003. Starting with little fanfare, written by Robert Kirkman and drawn by Tony Moore, it seemed an unusual choice for the independent comic company to choose. It didn't exactly have a particularly auspicious start as Kirkman admitted in an interview with *Rolling Stone* back in 2013: "At that point, a lot of my books had failed, so I wasn't really in a position where I could say, "This comic is the zombie movie that never ends, and it'll go for years and years and years." But I had years of story lines planned when the first issue came out. I knew they were going to get to the prison. I knew they were going to have that area where they were going to be safe and they were going to start building a little civilization."

"There's never been anything like this on television. Zombies are essentially people who eat people, so it's a cannibal show. I was like, "I can't foresee there being a cannibal show on television!" -ROBERT KIRKMAN

In the same chat, he admits that he didn't think we would ever see a TV show based on *The Walking Dead*: "People would ask me, 'Wouldn't it be awesome if it was a TV show or a movie?' I would always say, 'Well, it'll never be a TV show or a movie.' There's never been anything like this on television. Zombies are essentially people who eat people, so it's a cannibal show. I was like, "I can't foresee there being a cannibal show on television!"

Kirkman's longtime artistic collaborator, British artist Charlie Adlard, came on board with issue #7 and has been there ever since. In an interview he did with *Den Of Geek* back in 2011, he boiled down how to describe the comic in one sentence: "It's a comic about a disparate bunch of people who have to cope with an extreme circumstance and the drama that comes from that sort of circumstance. The extreme circumstance is the zombie apocalypse. I try not to say it's a zombie book, because I think that puts the demographic further away from the core genre audience."

When the comic hit 150 issues back in 2016, Adlard revealed what a huge achievement it was to reach this milestone in a chat he did on Image's website: "I think I'm personally most proud of just getting to this point. It's



been one hell of a 12+ years so far, and when I hear myself say that, it's just incredible. No one in the industry at this present time has achieved the sheer amount of product (hopefully of quality too...well, at least some of it...) and I think that's something to be very proud of."

Despite Kirkman's scepticism, *The Walking Dead* came to TV way back in 2010 and started its ninth season in October. Spin-off TV show *Fear The Walking Dead* began in August 2015. Over its eight-year history, it has been one of the most talked-about and highest rated shows on TV on any channel. Its popularity has waned a little these days but it shows no sign of ending as yet.

Kirkman is still grateful for the opportunity to write *The Walking Dead* as he said in an interview for *Variety* in October of this year: "It's a gift to be still writing this comic," he said. "When I did

the first comic I thought if I get to do this for years and years it would be insane. All I wanted in my career was to be able to do this.

"Now, every time I sit down to write an



issue, every minute, even when there's a struggle, I recognize what a tremendous gift this is."

Very few comics reach such a high issue number and very few TV series make it into a ninth season so it is testament that Kirkman and his artistic collaborator Adlard have obviously

"It's a gift to be still writing this comic. When I did the first comic I thought if I get to do this for years and years it would be insane. All I wanted in my career was to be able to do this" -ROBERT KIRKMAN

tapped into something that continues to connect with audiences and readers around the world. It will be interesting to see what an impact the departure of Andrew Lincoln as Rick Grimes but one thing is certain: *The Walking Dead* has left a massive legacy in comics and on TV as well. Happy 15th birthday to Rick and his crew...

JOEL MEADOWS

The Walking Dead TV show season nine started in October on AMC in the US and *The Walking Dead* comic is published monthly by Image Comics.



Looking For Redemption

Daredevil season three started on Netflix in October and JOEL MEADOWS spoke to its executive producer Erik Olesen at New York Comic Con about the latest trials and tribulations for Matt Murdock and his friends...



pic: Joel Meadows

and yet put their own stamp on the comics. I wanted to put my own stamp on the show. I also wanted to tell a story which more fully fleshed out the ensemble. I am a firm believer that nobody is really a sidekick, that everybody is the hero of their own story"

He also had a very specific tone in mind for the new run:

"But one of the early things that I told Marvel was that I wanted to aim tonally between season one of the show and *The Sopranos*. I wanted to bring that kind of storytelling model where you are telling the story from the inside, meaning from the experience of the characters so that you are experiencing the story like Matt Murdoch would or like Karen Page would. We're not watching them from outside with lots of cool stuff happening. That's not really my style. My style is more character-driven. Then you have these lightning bolt moments and you go 'Oh that's right, we're watching this awesome show that has these amazing iconic moments and action sequences and that heightened reality'. But everybody is able to be real in the scenes and as a result, I'm bonding the audience and the character hopefully in an honest way."

Olesen was keen to ground the show in the real world from the start, he is keen to point out to us and the return of Fisk was on the table from the start too:

"Marvel and Jeph Loeb had some cool

Daredevil is arguably Netflix's biggest and best-regarded Marvel show. Erik Olesen is the latest showrunner on the series and so there was some pressure on him to make sure the level of quality continued for a third season, he explained to us.

"First of all the show was awesome and I wanted to meet that bar and exceed it if I possibly could. When I walked in the door, Marvel had a number of ideas as

options for me. 'Do you want to do something like this? For instance the return of Wilson Fisk.' They knew that Vincent [D'Onofrio] was interested in coming back. So I had the ability to take from some of my favourite comicbook runs as well. But when I came in the door, I wanted to treat season three as if it were my own run of the comics in the way that Miller or Bendis or Smith or any of those guys were able to come in and do their run that honoured what came before it



"One of the early things that I told Marvel was that I wanted to aim tonally between season one of the show and *The Sopranos*."

top left: Matt Murdock (Charlie Cox) confronts Wilson Fisk (Vincent D'Onofrio) in prison; right: Murdock as Daredevil



Matt Murdoch (Charlie Cox) meets Foggy Nelson again (Elden Henson)

ideas about it even before I walked in the door. We started talking and there was also the possibility of using another major iconic character from the comics in the show. I took a bunch of options away to my writing cave and I came up with what I thought would be a really cool story, and a story that meant something too, and then brought it back to Marvel. What I mean about meaning something, another one of my goals is not just to tell a story that's mindless entertainment and has lots of gee whiz stuff in it... I wanted the show to become a part of the conversation about the world we're living in today to make it relevant. I was a terrific admirer of JJ's season one, I liked what they were able to say and also what Mel said with *Jessica Jones* season one. *Daredevil* is the man without fear and yet we're all living in a world where our fears are both driving the way that we behave and we vote and our fears are also being preyed upon by villains who are using

our fears to pit us against one another on their quest to rise in power."

The plot for *Daredevil* season three does draw from some of the character's most iconic and popular comicbook runs but it isn't an adaptation.

"Season three is an original story which takes elements of *Born Again*, *Guardian Devil* and some other aspects. Again it's an original story so that people who are not familiar with the comics can watch it and enjoy it and say 'wow that was a really great crime drama, twisty turny conspiracy thriller.' That's really what we wrote and people who are fans of the comics and are familiar with the comics are going to leap out of their seats and go 'Oh my God, they used that frame from something or that scene from that other run' and my fellow geeks are going to hopefully cackle with as much delight as we did in the writer's room when we were making this up. But it is not a direct translation of any of the comic books."

Olesen explains what he meant by mentioning HBO's seminal *The Sopranos* TV show.

"What I meant by describing it as season one meets the Sopranos is the kind of deep, smart, layered, emotionally honest character storytelling with an ensemble that is fully fleshed out. Super premium television drama."

The new season has been well-received and Olesen would be happy coming back to this world but he doesn't know what Marvel's plans are for Netflix shows going forward:

"I don't know what the future is of Marvel who has us all on lockdown. Much to Marvel's chagrin, the showrunners on each of the shows actually talk to each other. I had a terrific experience and I would be eager to do it again."

Daredevil season 3 is available now to watch on Netflix



Matt Murdoch/ *Daredevil* (Charlie Cox) with Karen Page (Deborah Ann Woll)

Playing With **Fire**

Constantine: City Of Demons is the latest Warner Bros Animated Movie and JOEL MEADOWS caught up with its screenwriter JM DEMATTEIS plus its producer BUTCH LUKIC and one of its voice cast members Damian O'Hare at New York Comic Con in October...

John Constantine is one of the more unlikely of DC's creations to make the move from the comics page to TV or animation. Created by Alan Moore, Steve Bissette and John Totleben in the pages of *Swamp Thing* back in the 1980s, he went on to star in his own comic series developed by fellow British writer Jamie Delano and artist John Ridgeway. The character appeared in one season of his own show *Constantine* on Fox back in 2014. But it seems you can't keep a good sorcerer down. The character came back for a series of cameos in CW's *Legends of Tomorrow* and he is now a regular character in the fourth season of that show, running currently on the CW.

Constantine also featured in the Warner Bros. Animated *Justice League Dark* movie last year so it was only a matter of time before the fast-talking Scouser would have his own animated vehicle. *Constantine: City of Demons* is a 90 minute animated movie which started life as a 10 episode 5 minutes an installment on CW Seed last year.

Screenwriter JM DeMatteis is a writer with decades of experience writing comics for a range of titles including *Justice League International*, *The Defenders*, *Captain America*, *Amazing Spider-man* and *Abazad* for publishers



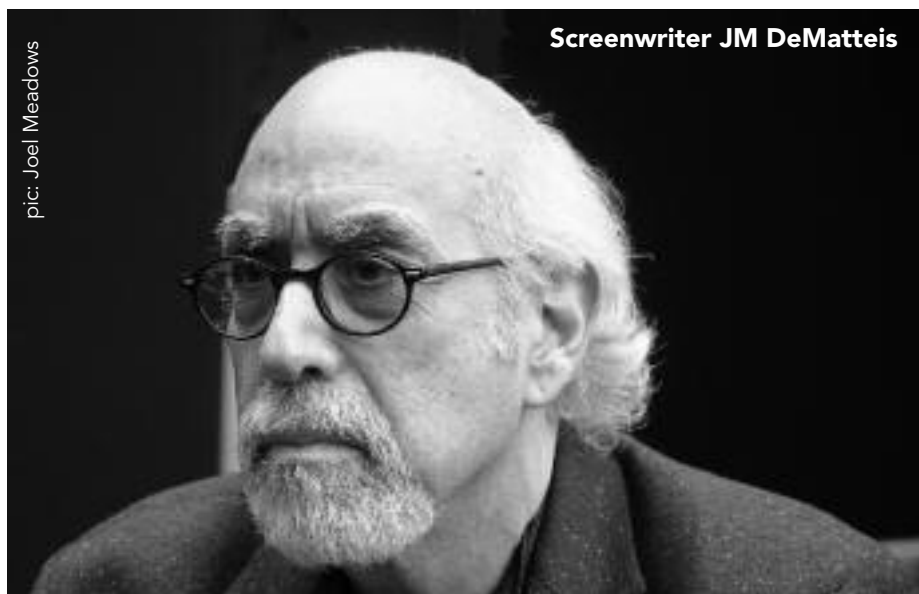
like Marvel, DC and CrossGen. He is no stranger to writing for animation either with a CV that includes *The Real Ghostbusters*, *Justice League Unlimited*, *Legion of Super-Heroes* and *Batman: The Brave and the Bold*. For him, writing is writing as he told me when I caught up with him at New York Comic Con last month.

"The main difference for me is not so much the breaking the story. Story is story. The difference is when you're

writing a comicbook even if you're writing the mainstream iconic characters, there's a writer, there's an artist, there's an editor and that's about it. Once you have a reputation and you've proved yourself, you're on your own often in creating story. When you're writing for TV, when you're writing for film, it's always much more of a team process."

However, he did have quite a bit of latitude to tell this particular tale, he revealed: "I had a lot of freedom on this to tell the story the way I wanted to tell it which is not always the case. But at the same time, I'm in New York and I get on the phone with a bunch of people in LA and there's ten voices on the other side with notes and questions and things to say so it's always a team thing and you have to go in knowing it's not like 'This is my vision'. It doesn't work that way. And as soon as I take off my solo hat and put on my team hat, it's really fun. Because I spend a good part of my time at home alone with my imaginary friends so to work with other human beings who are smart and creative is a lot of fun. But that's the main difference. Working on creator-owned comics you're free to do everything exactly the way you like."

He has worked on quite a lot of horror titles over the years and he does seem drawn to the genre as a writer. For him, it



pic: Joel Meadows

Screenwriter JM DeMatteis

pic: Joel Meadows



Producer Butch Lukic

holds a particular kind of appeal, he admits.

"What's funny is I keep realizing 'I'm pretty good at this horror stuff and it's never my first choice' because I'm really into crawling through the dark but into the light. And I'm working on this *Constantine* thing and it's really dark. There's some really twisted stuff in there. And I'm really good at this. So I think horror allows us to access a certain part of our nature. As a writer, you have to be in touch with all parts of yourself. You have to be in touch with the Jesus in your soul and the devil in your soul and so it allows you to explore those dark areas of your own psyche. Also we live in a dark world sometimes, so it's a good way to deal with those issues. Also I find that the horror stories allow you to get into more metaphysical areas or spiritual areas."

Constantine: City of Demons' producer Butch Lukic has worked on a number of other Warner Bros. Animated projects like *Superman: Doomsday*, *Wonder Woman* and *Justice League Action* and for him, the character has a lot of fans so it made sense for DC to create a vehicle for him as part of their animated universe, he tells us.

"I think that DC and Warner Bros.

together realised that they do have a character regardless of that TV show not going another season. Obviously it has a lot of fans so for them to just leave it alone just wouldn't have worked. So I think if they weren't going to do a second season, this was their other option. They can at least keep it going somehow as a standalone and if we can do animation successfully, then it's a win situation for them and us. Either way I'm hoping they do a live action season again. It would be great. If this does well, they might think about it again."

Lukic is a longtime reader of the character in the comics and the appeal of John Constantine as a protagonist is obvious for him:

"I've read it since he was introduced in *Swamp Thing* when Alan Moore wrote it and you get the character right away. You can't help it. He's loveable regardless of being a miserable sod. He's great. He may want to get into fights from time to time but he's got a certain charm about him.

Voice actor Damian O'Hare voiced John Constantine in *Justice League Action* but here he is his longsuffering mate, Chas Chandler. For him, there is unique chemistry between the pair as

"I think horror allows us to access a certain part of our nature. As a writer, you have to be in touch with all parts of yourself." -JM DEMATTEIS

characters in *City of Demons*, he explains to us in New York:

"Reading the script, there's a wonderful relationship between the two of them. So they haven't seen each other in 20 years because of this terrible incident that happened in Newcastle which no one talks about... there's a great relationship there, when you have a friend you haven't seen in years. You sit down and it's like you saw them just the day before. There's that connection again. There's a wonderful scene when they first meet and they're sitting in a diner and they're just speaking to each other. Because it's a 90 minute movie, we actually played it like a live action film."

For DeMatteis, even though Constantine seems like a cold-hearted monster, there is still something positive at his heart as a character. In fact, he saw parallels between him and another real-life famous Scouser:

"For whatever reason he tries to twist it around, he still tries to be the biggest bastard on the block, he makes a choice time and again to work on the side of the light. So that says something about what's lying underneath that character. Weirdly I am a big Beatles fan and so when I was writing this, when I kept thinking about Matt Ryan [the voice of Constantine], I kept thinking about John Lennon. Both from Liverpool, both really hard -edged, tough, they could be really nasty and underneath that, total idealists."

With John Constantine appearing in *Legends of Tomorrow* and this standalone animated film, it is likely that DC will continue to shine a light on the company's most popular anti-hero. Let's raise a pint to the necromancer with a heart.

Constantine: City Of Demons is available now on Blu ray and DVD



While they are currently chronicling the young 007-to-be's formative days in *James Bond Origin*, Dynamite Entertainment hasn't forgotten about the master spy's current adventures. Following on from several mini-series by the likes of Warren Ellis, Jason Masters, Andy Diggle and Ales Kot, this month sees the arrival of a brand new monthly title by former *Incredible Hulk* scribe Greg Pak and British artist Marc Laming (*American Century*, *King's Watch*, *Fantastic Four*). But unlike its predecessors, *James Bond 007* will be released on an ongoing basis.

"I've been working closely with our editor Nate Cosby for months, building an epic twelve-issue storyline that's broken down into three four-issue chapters," explains Pak. "So it's going to build and build and build over those twelve issues, with new surprises and reveals raising the stakes at every level. We then hit a huge climax with #12, but we're also setting up plenty of fun elements that can lead to the next big story if sales are great."



Officially licenced from Ian Fleming Publications, the comic draws on the late author's fourteen *James Bond* novels and short story collections rather than the numerous films that have exploded onto the big screen over the past six decades. "We're working within the continuity of Dynamite's other *James Bond* books," says Pak. "But we're not a sequel and we aren't tying into any specific story elements from those books, so if you're new to these comics, you don't have to worry about doing any homework."

As the title of the first storyline 'The Odd Job' indicates, Bond crosses paths with a new mysterious assassin who appears to be related to *Odd Job*, Auric Goldfinger's Korean henchman in both the *Goldfinger* novel and film, who was infamous for his razor-edged bowler hat. "When Nate first approached me about writing a *Bond* book, the very first thing I pitched him was

B O N D J A M E S B O N D

By Stephen Jewell

updating Oddjob and making him awesome and sexy, and the hero of his own story," recalls Pak, who is of Korean-American descent himself. "Years ago I was blown away by a moment in Maxine Hong Kingston's book *Tripmaster Monkey* in which her main character talks about Oddjob and the fact that if you put any face up on the big screen as a hero, the entire audience will fall in love with them. So it's a huge thrill to take this character that's gotten tons of notoriety as a villain and to build him up as a hero in his own right, who can be Bond's biggest rival, ally, or maybe even his deadliest enemy."

Describing the set-up as "classic and simple," Oddjob's motivations and intentions aren't immediately apparent to either Bond or indeed the reader. "Bond's been assigned to kill a Russian smuggler and secure his mysterious briefcase," teases Pak. "But he discovers that a deadly Korean assassin who wears a familiar bowler hat appears to have the same mandate. As the story progresses, Bond and our new Oddjob will tangle with each other repeatedly, with some huge twists and massively escalating stakes, both physical and emotional. So while our new Oddjob is the book's antagonist, in his mind, he's the protagonist and Bond is the antagonist."

According to Pak, Bond and the new Oddjob have more in common than what sets them apart. "I love both of these characters so much and I love the way they clash," he continues. "Every scene with them is just a huge pleasure to write and Marc Laming is drawing the hell out of them. I see Bond as the consummate cool professional who prides himself on

his ruthless skill and efficiency in completing his mission at all costs. Our new Oddjob is just as ruthless, but as we'll see, he's driven by passion instead of professionalism. Exactly what that means remains to be seen, but it provides some hugely fun reveals and sparks between Bond and our new man in every single scene."

When it came to bringing the new Oddjob to life on the page, Laming very much took his lead from Pak and Cosby. "Greg and Nate had a strong idea of what they were after so it was more of a question of realising their take on the character and fleshing him out until we were all happy with the outcome," says Laming, who kept his favourite big screen 007s in mind when it came to depicting Bond himself.

"I'm a big fan of the Connery, Lazenby and Craig takes on Bond, so all the movies have been a big influence on my approach to the book," he adds. "I want to bring the grit and adventure of their movies to the look of the book. On *Her Majesty's Secret Service* is my favourite Bond movie, so I'm sure some of that will find its way through to the comic. But recent action films like *The Raid*, *The Bourne* films and *John Wick* have also been a big influence, especially on the action sequences."

Insisting that he wants to "write a fun book for modern audiences that folks of all backgrounds can enjoy without feeling alienated," Pak will be bearing in mind changing attitudes to women and other relevant issues including race. "One little thing I've realised is that we've often got Bond and our new Oddjob as the objects

of the gaze whom women in the book are eyeing rather than the other way around," he says. "The book's biggest female characters are Money Penny, who's a voice in Bond's ear throughout the series who both helps him and tries to keep him in line, and an Asian secret agent codenamed Agent K, who is a brand new character who becomes a deadly rival to both Bond and our new Oddjob. I can't say too much about her yet for fear of spoilers, but she's absolutely critical to our story."

Rather than *Spectre* or *Smersh*, 'The Odd Job' introduces a new sinister terrorist network in the form of the nefarious ORU. "I love the Bond mythos for all its varied crime bosses and criminal organisations, so it's a huge amount of fun to be able to add a new group to the fold," says Pak. "ORU distinguishes itself for being a terrifyingly deadly terrorist group that has never announced its mission or philosophy. Figuring out exactly what ORU has planned and why is a huge, high stakes mystery for our heroes."

Ranging from Singapore, Indonesia, England and Australia in the first few issues, Pak and Laming will also be taking Bond to some very interesting and sometimes exotic locations. "We've been doing a lot of thinking about the places we want to visit as we build our set pieces," teases Pak. "You can also expect to see some familiar faces including Money Penny, M and at least one character that I am not currently licenced to spoil!"

James Bond 007 #1 is published on November 7.



LICENSED TO THRILL?

Over on the other side of the pond, US comics publisher Boom! Studios recently announced its acquisition of the license to publish Buffy the Vampire Slayer comics, previously held by Dark Horse. I don't know if the deal came as a shock to Dark Horse, who have also lost the license to publish Joss Whedon's SF project Firefly to Boom and Star Wars and Conan comics to Marvel in recent years, but for me, it did provide sharp focus just how valued some licensed comics are.

Most Comic Scene readers are very used to seeing comics based on their favourite film, TV or computer game characters on the news stand and in comic shops, and there's a long tradition of TV and film stars featuring in British comics publishing, rubbing shoulders with "own brand" characters. The Funny Wonder published Charlie Chaplin strips, for example, beginning in 1915, and older comic fans will be familiar with Radio Fun and Film Fun, which led with stories based on the celebrities of the day. Truth be told, with so little documentation available, it's not totally clear whether those celebrities earned anything from their comic strip appearances, but companies producing TV western shows certainly did in the 1950s, a decade which also saw the appearance of a "P.C. 49" strip, based on the BBC radio series, in Eagle, although the fact that the radio show was created by Eagle writer Alan Stranks no doubt smoothed that deal.

Comics editors were for decades happy to simply echo popular media trends rather than license characters. Witness, for example the way Valiant star "The Steel Claw" moved from grungy anti-hero, to secret agent, to super hero and alien chaser in the 1960s. But with the staggering sales success of titles such as TV Comic, TV Century 21 and Lady Penelope couldn't be ignored, with their strips based on series such as Doctor Who and Thunderbirds. Similarly, Odhams licensing of both DC Comics and Marvel superheroes for titles such as SMASH! (no doubt noting the success of L. Miller and Sons and the Alan Class-published reprints

of the 1950s and 60s) preceded the arrival of Marvel UK in 1972, launching with The Mighty World of Marvel. It was pretty clear to some the direction of travel, with the success of Marvel UK's Planet of the Apes and Star Wars Weekly in the 1970s paving the way for the dramatic rise in licensed comics such as Transformers and The Real Ghostbusters in the 1980s and Sonic the Comic in the 1990s.

Slowly but surely, combined with the rising grip of supermarkets on the UK news stand - businesses that play to the "top sellers" in all their product lines, comics included - licensed comics took hold of newsagents' shelves, and "own brand" titles faded away. Bunty, Jinty, Buster, Eagle, Valiant, Lion, Tiger, Whizzer and Chips are long gone, replaced with most titles now playing to the interests of current trends, publishers keen to spot the next Peppa Pig or snap up rights to "evergreen" licenses such as LEGO, or Doctor Who.

Of course, it's not always plain sailing when it comes to picking the right license. Not every TV, film or computer game brand blend easily into a comic, for a variety of reasons, and the cost of licensing a successful brand can cripple a publisher that finds it doesn't also commit the editorial spend on developing content that picks up on the successful elements of a license. If a film also proves a dud at the box office, the licensed comics that go with it can also crash and burn. Licensors who, in their insistence on any publishing staying firmly "on brand" (from approving likeness issues to storylines), can also prove more trouble to a publisher than the license cost, for all the quality of the final product.

(I can recall how the print run of one Marvel UK annual was pulped despite all approvals secured, which is an extreme case. Don't get me started on licensors that balked at approving plots, scripts, artwork, lettering, covers in a timely fashion I've sometimes had to deal with down the years).

Interviewed for trade magazine InPublishing recently, Peppa Pig publisher

Redan Managing Director Julie Jones noted the biggest challenge comics and young people's magazines publishers face is always choosing the right property in the first place.

"No-one knows in advance what will be a hit and what won't be, so often it's down to gut feel," she commented. With the rise of so many different medium where the next trend may surface - be it a Netflix or Prime Video TV show, a computer game, toy or hit film - it's increasingly tricky to spot something that might also be a publishing success, in a sector also dependent on cover mounts to sell their wares, particularly as cover prices have risen".

(Who knows what the future of cover mounts will be as consumers justifiable concern over plastic waste grows, but that's another story).

There is, of course, one obvious danger to being dependent on licensed brands for your titles - and that's the fact that when that license comes up for renewal, that license may yet be snatched from you, as Dark Horse has recently experienced, even though they published Buffy the Vampire Slayer comics for 20 years.

Despite the dangers and potential pitfalls of licensing brands, the sales success of popular titles ensures the practice will continue, with children's magazine market still one of publishing's more robust sectors. But the "original" comics that have survived - Beano and 2000AD, in particular - have, ironically, done so by playing rival licensed comics at their own game. They've continued, in part, to ape popular trends and adapting to fit the cloth of the market (Beano more so than 2000AD), to the point that they have become hugely successful brands in their own right, prompting film and TV producers to come to them for licenses.

Who isn't looking forward to the new Rogue Trooper film or the Minnie the Minx TV show? Although I'm just hoping some canny producer rifles through a copy of the Phoenix and goes hunting the rights to Robert Deas brilliant "Trailblazers". That would be terrific!

**NUTS & BOLTS
RAVINGS FROM INSIDE THE
COMICS PUBLISHING INDUSTRY**

Author: John Freeman
Twitter: @johnfreeman_dtt
Website: downthetubes.net
John is currently writing **Crucible**



phil-comics presents...



Vintage British Comics

The market in vintage British comics is vibrant and has kept us merrily busy for **fifteen years, trading on eBay as phil-comics**. We imagine, if you are reading this, there is a pretty good chance that you have either still got some original comics from your childhood and / or are regularly scouring the land for old issues to add to your collection and regain those lost issues; "I came back from university to find that my Mum had thrown out my beloved comic collection" is a regular story we hear.

As an avid Beano reader in 1990, I soon developed an interest in older editions of Beano and Dandy comics and annuals. Years of collecting led to selling spares and a hobby business was born. With the advent of eBay, this hobby developed into a full time business. We now auction all vintage British comics and recently branched out into American comics.

One of the highlights of trading in, and indeed collecting, comics is the variety that each collection brings, along with unexpected 'hidden gems' which cause a



Smash Comic #14 (1966)

flutter in the heart. The classic example is the long forgotten free gift tucked inside the comic, but we don't necessarily mean items of high value, indeed just diverse and unusual. In a collection of 1970s Beano comics we bought recently, from the original owner, came a 1974 letter from the Beano Editor Harry Cramond, type written with a vintage Beano letterhead. A joke had been sent in and the editorial team had incorporated it into the McTickles strip and rewarded the young reader with a full colour McTickles picture. We've not seen this picture before and doubt that many, if any, others still exist. Somewhere in my own collection archive is a letter sent to me from Euan Kerr, in the early 1990s as a young teen, responding to my question as to why 'slipperin' had been phased out of comics in the 1970s.

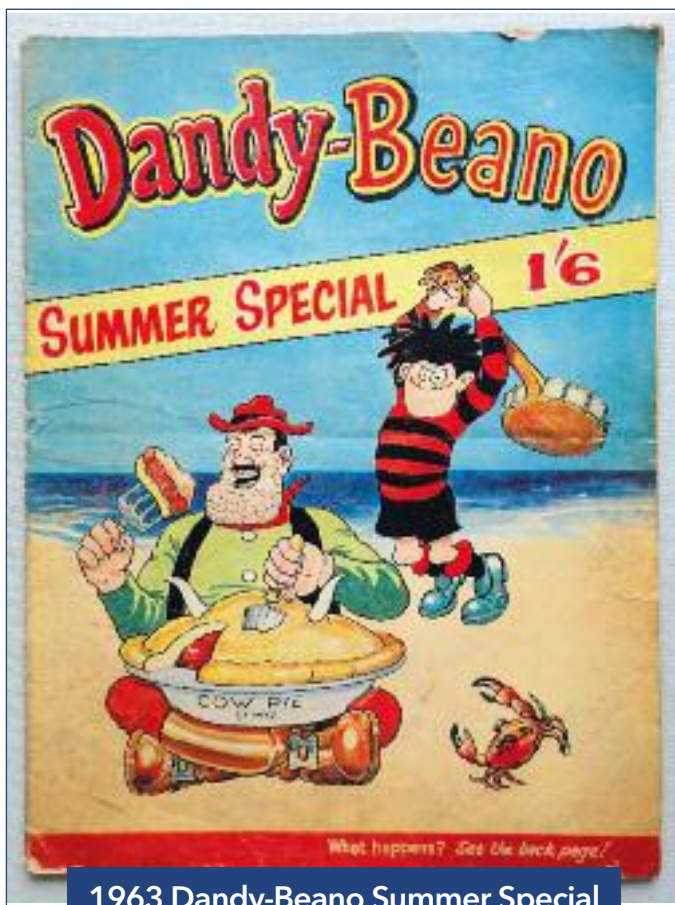




Smash Comic #3 (1966)

In our early November sale we auctioned a **Smash comic #14 (1966)** which appears to have been an Odhams Press file copy. Each page provides details on who supplied the script, artwork and lettering and the fee paid in each case. Of interest to the Ken

Reid fans will be the 'Queen of the Seas' page where Ken wrote the script and of course drew the incredible artwork. Ken's work is very topical at present with the recent publication of the superb 'Power Pack', by Irmantas Povilaika, reprinting all of his 1960s Odhams work. Talking of Smash, the first issue with free gift gun shot to an impressive £183, whilst the rarer free gift with **#3**, the Phantom Plane, flew to £105 in our October sale.



1963 Dandy-Beano Summer Special

As collectors ourselves we have a soft spot for Summer and Holiday Specials. We adore the stand out full colour covers and many collectors will have fond memories of reading them at Blackpool or other British holiday destinations. Their scarce yet finite nature makes them desirable to collect and some can be hotly contested. In June we were consigned an astonishing collection of approximately 900 specials, representing the vast majority of British editions from c1961/1962 (when the trend started) to the early 2000s, from every genre imaginable. Key highlights from the collection sold to date have been £282 paid for a **1963 Dandy-Beano Summer Special**, £102 for a 1982 Jinty Special, £90 for the 1968 Bunty edition, £80 for the 1966 Robin and £122 for the scarcely seen #1 Victor Special of 1967. An impressive £110 was paid for a 1980 Buster and Monster Fun Holiday Special, illustrating a bidding contest between two very eager collectors.

From the same collection came the scarcely seen 1976 Blue Peter Holiday Special, with free gift sticker, selling for £22. Whilst grading it, we spotted a double page spread inside describing Blue Peter's visit to the IPC archive of comic bound volumes. For whatever reason, this was just a one-off special, despite the TV programme itself celebrating its 60th birthday recently.



1982 Jinty Special

We've auctioned several hundred bound volumes in recent years and they still divide opinion. We think they're glorious and a fantastic way to present a collection of

comics, but we also appreciate that many people are driven to collect by a strong feeling of nostalgia, thus preferring their comics to be individual, just as they would have read them each week as a child. We recently auctioned one of the original Fleetway archive half year bound volumes of June and School Friend, Jan-Jun 1966. After paying £127 for the volume, the buyer said he was extremely pleased as he'd spent years trying to piece together the individual issues that contain the 'Growing Up of Emma Peel' (from The Avengers) strip. He commented that "this is the ideal way to get these, it's the whole series in one whole volume, starting in January and ending in April, so to get it all complete in a bound volume is terrific." Other notable results included £282 paid for Marilyn 1-15 (1955) and bought by a female academic who is researching pop



1968 Bunty Edition

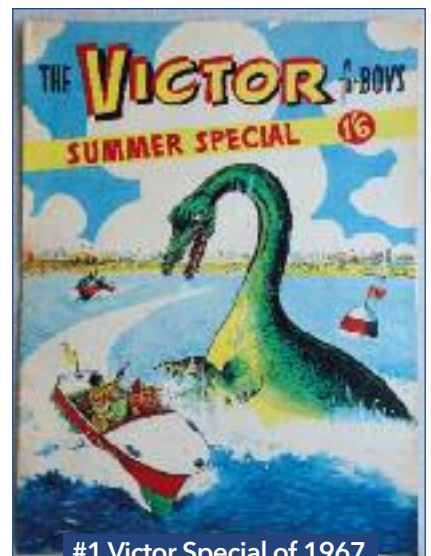
music and comics in the late 1950s, with plans to publish her work, £272 for the full year of TV Comic 1972 and £270 for Eagle Volume 4 (1953). There'll be more bound volumes appearing in our future auctions.

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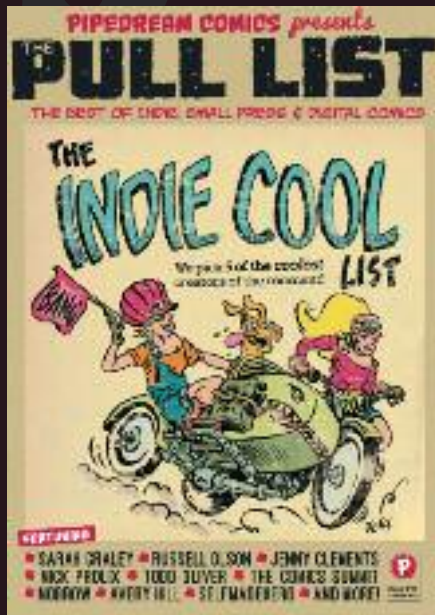


#1 Victor Special of 1967

At phil-comics we continuously seek rare single items to large collections and if you're interested in our auction prices, you can search them all on our website. We handle the sale of just about any comic item - depending on its vintage - comics, annuals, summer specials, original artwork, free gifts and reference books - and offer a vast array in our monthly eBay auctions. We make competitive offers to buy outright and can also auction the collection on your behalf, so please get in touch if you are looking to sell.

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THE STATE OF INDEPENDENTS

The UK's independent and small press comics scene has never been more exciting. We bring you a look at some of the best!

"Just what is a 'zine' anyway?"

Alex Thomas heads to the Bristol Comic and Zine Fair to find out

After the craziness of Thought Bubble, we headed to the Bristol Comics and Zine fair for a slice of arty small press in the south west. But what is a zine and how is it different to a small press or indie comic book?

The word zine originates from the term 'fanzine' and traditionally meant a hand made publication full of articles, reviews or even full blown comic strips written and published by amateurs. The world of comics fanzines began to take off in the late 1960s and if you want to look at a fantastic history of fanzines in the UK then be sure to check out the excellent FanScene compiled by David Hathaway-Price that can be downloaded from davidprice5.wixsite.com/classicukcomicszines.

However in recent years, the term 'zine' has become short hand for self published and micro-published comics that are often at the artier end of the comics spectrum. Events like the East London Comics Art Festival (ELCAF) and Bristol have become the epicentres for these kind of comics and it's a diversity of creators which makes them so exciting. While the artists alley at an MCM will be filled with incredible books that rival the Big Two in terms of production value, the world of the



zine fair is more like an Art School end of year show. While there are breakout creators like Hamish Steele, who went on to work for larger companies like Nobrow, or publishers like Avery Hill and Good Comics whose work manages to cross over into the indie and small press world, a zine fair is as much about discovering the next exciting creator as it is picking up a book that you'd see in a comic shop.

At this year's event we picked up books from the likes of: Todd Oliver, whose wacky and weird humour reminds us of classic 80s comics like

Oink and Toxic; Josh Hicks, whose Glorious Wrestling Alliance books capture the craziness of professional wrestling in comic strip form; and Rozi Hathaway, whose thoughtful and poetic work uses watercolour washes to create lush stories, and her latest book is printed on newsprint paper.

Events like this are often free to get into as they join up with the local art community or university, so the next time you see one advertised in your area, why not pop in and discover what zines are all about. It might even inspire you to make your own!

“We wanted it to feel like all the best kids stories, where they go on crazy adventures, but are back in time for tea!”

Leah Moore & John Reppion talk *Conspiracy of Ravens*

Conspiracy Of Ravens is the first creator owned book from Leah Moore and John Reppion, with art from small press star Sally Jane Thompson. This all ages adventure features a young girl at boarding school who discovers a fantastic secret about her family history, including inheriting the mysterious Raven Hall. We caught up with Leah and John to find out more.

This is your first creator owned title, so what was it that made you choose to finally go down this avenue?

Leah Moore: This book is so special to us, and the fact that it is creator owned is a huge part of that. I think with work for hire stories, you kind of steel yourself not to get too attached because you know you can't keep it, if that makes sense? With COR all that went out of the window and we have been allowed to just take our ideas and run with them.

The group of girls are the key to it all really. They have this amazing journey, and discover all kinds of magical secrets about themselves, but at the end of the day, the most compelling thing is how they cope with all that as a group of friends.

What made you make the move into all ages story-telling?

LM: I think we have always wanted to



Leah and John began creating COR with Sally thanks to this image on Twitter.

write something that younger readers would enjoy. It's hard to hear your kids asking what are you working on, and you have to say they aren't big enough to read it yet. With COR, we wanted to give a feel of all the best kids stories, where they get to go on crazy adventures, and battle scary villains but they still had to be back for tea, and do their maths homework.

Can you tell us a bit about how you came to work with Sally on this book?

John Reppion: Back in 2012 Sally ran a

give-away on Twitter offering sketches to her followers. My name got picked out of the hat and Sally came up with this piece of art showing a young woman in Victorian dress opening a locket and a flock of ravens flying out of it. We had a couple of Tweets back and forth and then we realised this was actually a really good idea and started coming up with the beginnings of *Conspiracy of Ravens*.

Conspiracy of Ravens is available now from Dark Horse Comics.

Devil in Disguise vol.1

Publisher: LabRat Comics

Writer: Matt Garvey

Artist: Robert Ahmad

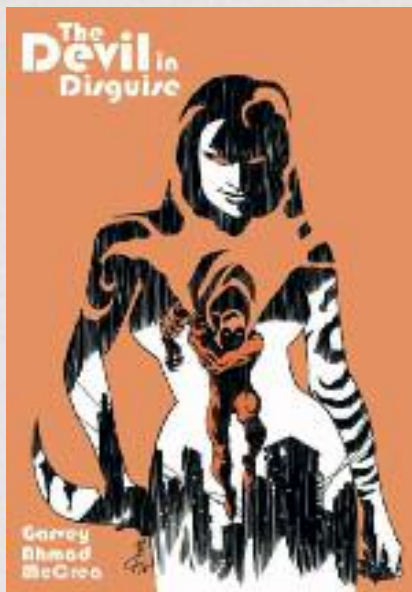
Price: £10 from

mattgarvey.bigcartel.com

At first Devil in Disguise feels more like a lost Hammer Horror short, but through the first volume Matt Garvey's demonic superhero evolves into a really enjoyable mix of Moon Knight, Spawn and 1970s Marvel.

After a chance encounter on a train our hero becomes possessed by a devil and must stop another demon from destroying the world. But it's not just demonic destruction, there is plenty of sparkling banter between our hero and 'Lou' which makes it a real fun read and is becoming a hallmark of Garvey's writing. Robert Ahmad's orange and black artwork give the book a really fresh feel for small press, especially the colours which remind us of Franco Francavilla's work on Afterlife with Archie, but with a more Marvel style to the character design with shades of Morbius in there in places.

With a fast paced story that really zips along, this mix of horror, humour and heroes makes for a devillishly good read!



Close

Publisher: Comichaus

Writer: Chris Sides

Artist: Chris Travell

Price: £5 from Comichaus.com

Joining 32 Kills as the latest part of the Comichaus line up, Close, is a slice of contemporary crime drama that sees a stalker wrongly convicted of a crime he didn't commit.

Jared has just been released from prison for stalking a Hollywood starlet. But when he is released on bail he ends up witness to her accidental death at the hands of her boyfriend.

Close has a very cinematic or TV mini series feel to it and you could definitely see it as a concept for a gritty HBO show or low budget indie movie. Originally pitched as a series in the Comichaus anthology it has been released from that structure and although it still has that chapter structure, which definitely reinforces that mini series vibe, it benefits from being read in one chunk - a bit like binge watching a box set.

Writer Chris Sides continues his excellent work from Impossible to create a really strong central concept for the book and some very sympathetic characters. The character of Jared is your classic tragic small time crook that we've seen in a million TV dramas, and is drawn back into his old ways on release from jail. But his story is given that extra poignancy by events being taken out of his control. It's a cautionary tale for anyone with vices and also a great twist on a well worn concept.

Sides' team up with artist Chris Travell also really pays dividends, and these long time friends have produced their best work to date here. Travell's detailed pencil style reminded us of Grayham Puttock's work on Red Rocket Comet and it's realism definitely helps make this story feel much more gritty and down to earth as a result. If you're a fan of contemporary crime books like Brubaker and Phillips' Criminal then this is the indie book for you!

Lip Hook

Publisher: SelfMadeHero
Writer: David Hine
Artist: Mark Stafford
Price: £14.99 from SelfMadeHero.com

Lip Hook starts off as a fairly traditional crime story involving two gangsters on the run, but things take a turn for the darker as they discover a village of insect factories, lesbian witches and pagan rituals.

With echoes of everything from American Werewolf in London to Psycho, The Wicker Man and more, David Hine and Mark Stafford take these familiar tropes and dial the craziness up to 11 and beyond to create a dark and unsettling horror tale that is completely one of a kind. Every minute you think you have a handle on where the story is going,



there is a moment or a visual that reminds you this is not going to be what you expect and it builds and builds to a shocking and outrageously weird conclusion.

Hine and Stafford work in perfect harmony to create some bizarre and terrifying ideas. Stafford's incredible artwork is more than the match for Hine's extravagant

concepts and the two create pages which are densely layered, and packed full of strange and outlandish concepts that you won't forget.

Lip Hook is definitely not a book for everyone, as it's dark themes and strange, unsettling visuals are as shocking as they are spectacular. But if you like your books to be surreal, dark, funny and highly imaginative then you will not find a better and more outlandish book this year.

Kingdom

Publisher: Nobrow Press
Writer/Artist: Jon McNaught
Price: £16.99 from Nobrow.net

Kingdom centres around a young family on their way to a caravan park. It's a familiar journey for many, but McNaught makes it extraordinary by focusing his attentive eye on the minutiae of the trip and really capture the essence of that quintessential rite of passage that is a seaside holiday.

From the opening scenes in the motorway service station, to the obligatory trip to a gift shop, via the son's unlikely friendship with a local, McNaught manages to weave a sense of nostalgia and pathos into the page without really doing very much in terms of story telling. It is all about a series of moments, rather than a deeply thought out character study, and he builds what story he has using the small actions of his characters to create this deep and thoughtful look at a family on holiday.

Visually, McNaught has created a truly unique style for himself thanks to his sublime use of colour and a densely panelled page, packing upwards of 30 panels on one page at a time. But rather than it feel cluttered and over bearing, he uses this excess of panels to really capture the minutiae of the moments.



Tumult

Publisher: SelfMadeHero
Writer: John Harris
Dunning
Artist: Michael Kennedy
Price: £16.99 from SelfMadeHero.com

John Harris Dunning and Michael Kennedy's debut graphic novel Tumult, definitely lives up to its title as

they create a chaotic and confusing world, featuring assassins with multiple personalities, government conspiracies and doomed love.

Tumult uses the central concept of multiple personalities to create a really interesting and original read and a truly unique heroine/femme fatale. The hero, Adam is the classic troubled middle-aged man who gets lured in by the dangerous world of a glamorous,



troubled woman who he attempts to rescue and protect. But it is Morgan/Leila who is the real focus of the story and makes for the most enigmatic character.

Dunning layers this story of doomed love and unhealthy obsession, with an espionage/government conspiracy sub plot which gives the story an added

element of danger and keeps you guessing about where the story is heading throughout. It clearly owes a debt to Hitchcock with its tensely building story and it's constant attempts to second guess where things are going. But it also has the coolness of a contemporary indie movie, and the sleek lines of a Sean Phillips book, thanks to some great work from Kennedy.

“Kids love monsters... and are more drawn to the dark and strange more than we adults are comfortable with!”

Hellbound Media talk Mandy The Monster Hunter

Although they made their names with books like Shock Value and Slaughterhouse Farm, Hellbound Media's real star is a monster hunter called Mandy who helps save kids from the beasts under their bed. With their latest series, The Legend of The Spindly Man drawing to a close very soon, we caught up with co-creator Mark Adams to find out the secret to a great scary monster.

What inspired you to make an all ages monster book?

Mark Adams: The nature of Mandy's world, protecting kids from creatures under the bed, meant the content of the first few short stories, were more of a dark fairy tale, and younger readers seemed drawn to it. Kids do love monsters after all, and are more drawn to the dark and strange more than we adults are comfortable with!

We love the idea that Mandy is contacted by kids sending her pictures where did that come from?

MA: Once Mandy's world began to evolve it needed a unique angle to help it stand out. The idea developed into Mandy being an urban legend for children - so when they lose a tooth they leave it for the Tooth Fairy, they write a letter to Santa, and when they have a monster they draw it and send it to Mandy.



Lyndon White is the latest artist to bring the world of Mandy the Monster Hunter to life.

Artist Lyndon White is a perfect fit for the Spindly Man, why is it so right?

MA: His art has really blown us away, and brought the whole world of the story to life. He can do the whimsical and cute in something like the Sock Monster, and then instantly contrast it with the dark and disturbing, but the art never conflicts, it feels part of the same world. Every time we think he'd reached a new high, he brought a new page that blew us away all over again.

What is the secret to a great monster?

MA: Aside from the visual, it's very

much about what they do and evoke. The Spindly Man's name partly invokes the notion of spiders, which are a common fear. He abducts children, which is perhaps the ultimate fear. I think the terror can often come from our own negotiated disbelief. That old house at the end of the lane? We know nothing really lives there, monsters aren't real... but what if? What if just THIS once... it was real?

You can purchase issue Mandy The Monster Hunter from hellboundmedia.co.uk/comic-books

The Bog Road

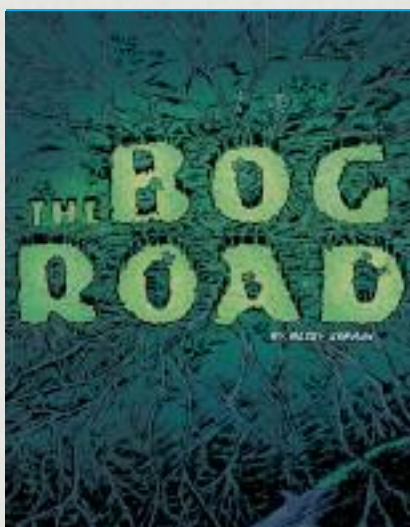
Publisher: Sub City Comics
Writer: Barry Keegan
Artist: Barry Keegan
Price: €15 from Sub City Comics

Barry Keegan's Celtic infused graphic novel is a fantastic mix of Irish mythology and superstition mixed with modern day horror movie morality.

While it starts as a fairly traditional monster book it soon evolves into something much more interesting. Starting off as a cautionary tale about mythical creatures on spooky back roads, it develops into a much broader modern folklore tale reminiscent of Neil Gaiman (especially with the mix of old world spiritual characters and modern day interfering men)

Writer Barry Keegan has created a beautiful and complex book that has a real originality and uniqueness to it. Pulling double duty, his artwork is also a big plus for the book, with a style that reminds us of a slightly less cartoony Gavin Mitchell from Trolltooth Wars and has the same green and grey colour palette throughout which makes it feel very organic and earthy.

Despite a slightly frustrating ending this is still a really interesting and highly enjoyable book and Barry is most definitely a talent we will be keeping an eye on for the future.



Fearscape

Publisher: Vault Comics
Writer: Ryan O'Sullivan
Artist: Andrea Mutti, Vladimir Popov (Colours), Andworld (Letters)
Price: £2.49 from comixology.co.uk

From the opening page which sees a succession of blank panels with the voice of a narrator rambling away over the top, you know you are in for something very different from this new book from writer Ryan O'Sullivan.

Henry Henry is a struggling author and translator for a much more successful writer, who takes advantage of his benefactor's success. But ends up being drawn into the mysterious world of the Fearscape and becomes a reluctant saviour for mankind.

O'Sullivan revels in having highly flawed and often unlikeable heroes for his stories and he writes Henry as such, packing his dialogue with flowery and verbose language. that brilliantly showcases Henry's arrogance and allows O'Sullivan to make the most of his lyrical vocabulary.



Artist Andrea Mutti's art has a beautiful angled shape and fine line to it, that makes Fearscape feels effortlessly contemporary and not just trying to be the next big thing, while the colour work from Vladimir Popov is muted and subtle but also eye popping where required.

It is difficult not to compare Fearscape to the work of Neil Gaiman, and like the Sandman scribe, Sullivan has delivered a complex and engaging story that has the scale and sophistication to be something very special indeed. We can't wait to see how long Henry can last before he is found out!

SMALL PRESS SPOTLIGHT

Aliens, demons & tentacled beasts in our horror round-up

If you like your horror tales quirky and cool then you can't go wrong with Dan White's new book *Sticky Ribs*. Featuring two short stories that are as stomach churningly grim as they are hilarious. Opener, *Your Body* has echoes of a Stephen King book, as a pair of high school kids discover an alien body. But it evolves into a David Cronenberg body horror after one of the kids comes into a bit too much contact with it. Meanwhile the second story, *Jackie Goes To Hell* sees a young woman journey to the afterlife in order to find her ex-boyfriend. Dan's art manages to capture the oozing quality of the alien body to perfection, as well as a sinister rogues gallery of demons in hell. All of which have a really simple monotone colour scheme. It's rounded off with an essay about Dan's love for *An American Werewolf in London* and makes for a fantastic collection of super cool horror stories.

Purchase *Sticky Ribs* from milkthecat.wordpress.com/the-shop

Writer Joey Oliveira has become one of the most interesting voices in small press horror thanks to spooky, psychic whodunnit *Ghost Island* and the nasty folk horror of *Tales of The Cryptoids*, and he is back in the woods for his latest story, *Wendigo Wood*. A young couple encounter a body on the road and when they need to decide whether to go on or help, they reluctantly stop and are drawn into a mysterious woodland cult. While it may have that classic



Texas Chainsaw Massacre model of weirdoes in a remote wood, *Wendigo Wood* is made all the more terrifying thanks to the sinister skull wearing creatures who they encounter and it makes it into a really creepy read as a result.

Purchase *Wendigo Wood* from

www.afterlightcomics.com

The latest offering from Samurai Slasher's Mike Garley has seen him team up with his old *Dead Roots* buddy Michael Lee Graham to create a slice of video nasty inspired horror. It starts with a truly shocking opener as 5 teenagers come round in a spooky house, covered in blood, in a room with demonic markings on the floor. And so begins a race to find out how and why they are there, whose blood it is and what the messages on the wall are all about.

It's a phenomenal start point for a book and the kind of story that only works in a comic as if you think too much into it, then it starts to stop making sense. However for an energetic horror thriller like this it works to perfection. Garley doesn't hold back after this opener though and the pace of the book rattles along at a hectic pace, reminiscent of the *Evil Dead*, and there is no time for the kids to think about what is going on, instead they

are pursued from a variety of angles.

Visually, *Our Final Halloween* looks incredible. Michael Lee Graham's artwork has the expressive and squashy faces of John Arcudi and the angles of Michael Oeming, but it is the unconventional colour palette which really helps it to stand out from the crowd. While Graham uses a dominant red for the blood soaked opening scene he goes on to use vintage greens and purples, or dirty Autumnal oranges and yellows in the various rooms of the house to give each one a unique feel. There is even

a two page infographic style spread that shows the various rooms in the houses and how the colour schemes apply which is a very smart piece of visual design.

***Our Final Halloween* will be available from mikegarley.com/store**

If after all this blood and guts you fancied an antidote, then be sure to check out the fantastic

Cthulu Kids. Writer Peter Duncan and Galaxafreaks artist Andrew Pawley create the surreal and technicolour adventures of Lovecraft's enigmatic and tentacled beasts during their formative years. It's a bit like the *Mountain of Madness* meets *Muppet babies* and thanks to Pawley's over the top visuals it creates a truly unique look at these horror staples. **Pick up *Cthulu Kids* from galaxafreaks.myshopify.com**



MAZE

Not least sending Tharg himself on an indefinite mission to Quaxxann and replacing him with Vector 13's Men in Black, the autumn of 1996 was a time of controversial change for the **Galaxy's Greatest Comic**. Still smarting after the less than favourable response to 1995's big screen Judge Dredd, the Mega-City lawman had also been sent packing, although only to elsewhere in the Prog after occupying the coveted first story status for the majority of the past two decades.

The series that then-2000 AD editor David Bishop chose to run in its stead couldn't have been more different to Ol' Stoney Face's gritty future cop adventures. Mostly set in a labyrinthine-esque fantasyland, Alan Grant and Arthur Ranson's Mazeworld - which has just been re-published by Rebellion in a larger Collector's Edition - was actually just about as grim as Judge Dredd, as it opened with the nominal hero Adam Cadman being hanged before being inexplicably transported to a strange world of mazes, where he is mistaken for the mythical folk hero, the Hooded Man.

While Mazeworld was originally inspired by computer games, Alan Grant admits that he had never actually played any himself, even though he penned the New Eagle's Computer Warrior - which featured characters playing real life computer games - for a decade. "It

changed quite rapidly once Arthur and I had discussed the whole idea," recalls Grant. "He wanted to illustrate a proper fantasy story, so that's the direction I took the writing, which then made it a story that 2000 AD would consider."

Describing it as "a true collaboration," Grant sent Ranson a few pages of notes before driving down to meet with the artist at his Surrey home. "He'd already done dozens of sketches, including the double-page spread from the first episode," he says. "Arthur's only real caveat was that he didn't want to illustrate a humour story, though I have to say, I didn't see much room for humour in what we came up with."

"I was really taken by the idea of a maze-based world, and curious to know what that would look like, I drew, for my own benefit, an aerial view of such a world,"

continues Ranson. "Alan later said that seeing that drawing influenced the way he constructed the story."

Proclaiming him to be a "first class illustrator and a master storyteller," Grant had previously collaborated with Ranson on several Judge Anderson series, most notably on the mind-bending Shamballa, which spanned Progs 700 to 711 from October to December 1990, and the seven-part Satan which ran in the Judge Dredd Magazine in 1995. "Arthur and I share an interest in the more surreal sides of life," says Grant. "Shamballa, Satan and Mazeworld all spring from that interest."

However, Ranson denies that there was any conscious link between Judge Anderson and Mazeworld. "Having spent a great deal of time sharing the adventures of Psi Judge Cassandra Anderson, I would be surprised if there



WORLD



was no connection whatsoever but part of the attraction of drawing Mazeworld was the possibility of doing something different," he reasons. "Having worked on Button Man, I wouldn't exactly say that I was typecast, but there was an itch to say 'look, I can also do other kinds of stuff.'"

Indeed the noir-flavoured adventures of hired killer Harry Exton couldn't be more different to Mazeworld's fantastical scenario, although as former writing partners, Alan Grant and John Wagner's working methods were unsurprisingly similar. "They both share an economy in writing, an exactness, where no words are wasted and there's no lengthy descriptions or instructions about presentation, and they're also both willing to listen to suggestions and allowed me some license when it came to framing and pacing," says Ranson. "The major difference lay in the kind of material they were interested in writing about. The plots I drew for John were of a concrete real stuff-type, as Button Man was all grit and spit and even the few Judge Dredd stories I did with John were about the tangible - a kidnap, a robot lavatory, fire and computer hacking. Alan, on the other hand, was happy to supply me with the otherworldly, the supernatural and the spooky. These I liked, not just for the content, but for the potential they gave me to play with techniques and layouts. In

either case, what I would be worrying about was how to make any world, this one or some other, look convincing."

Admitting that he is not much of a fantasy fan and that the last such book he read was Michael Moorcock's Elric series 45 years ago, Grant drew on his interest in ancient history for Mazeworld. "I'm very interested in Neolithic Man and his structures and have visited many throughout the UK," he says. "I've had some interesting and unusual experiences meditating in places like Maes Howe in Orkney and the Rollright Stones in Oxfordshire. Southwest Scotland, where I live, is replete with old and often unmarked-on-a-map structures. Within ten miles or so of my house, there's an ancient Celtic encampment, the remains of 12 Century fortresses and villages and a stone circle, as well as the second largest Celtic burial tomb in all Europe. I'm currently trying to persuade my grandkids to write a guide book to these places!"

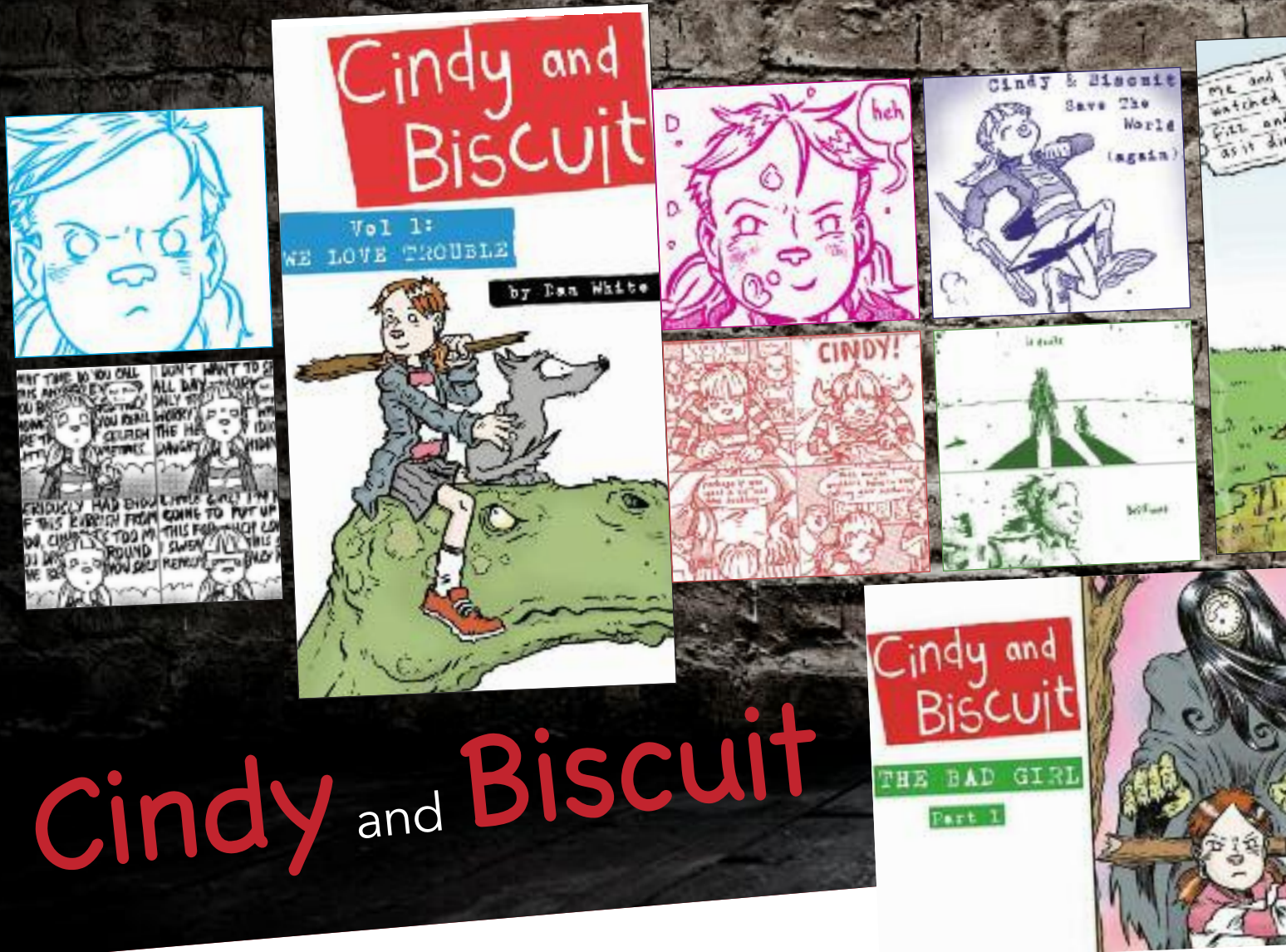
Noting that, "both were, like Mazeworld, not technologically advanced so buildings were constructed with muscle rather than machines," Ranson modeled on the look of Mazeworld itself on the ancient Egyptian and Aztec civilisations. "They were both religiously based and authoritarian, as Mazeworld is designed to be, so that was also a consideration," he says. "The beliefs of those societies are reflected in their

architecture, which is monolithic and top-down. Additionally, the pyramid as one of the basic forms of their architecture lent itself to the construction of a maze, whether constructed on its surface or contained inside it. At the centre of the aerial view I drew in the first episode, I included a large, basically circular area that was based on what is the traditional form for a labyrinth. Outlying districts I imagined as poorer and more primitive, so that was there in the street plans with mazes formed around the wooden dwellings."

Admitting that, "when I first started, I had no idea what he looked like," Ranson drew Adam Cadman wearing his hood for the vast majority of Mazeworld's trilogy of series, only revealing what he looked like in Prog #1160's conclusion of third installment, 'The Hell Maze.' It was for that reason that we don't see his face even before he's hooded," he recalls. "It was not until we get to the end and Adam's final unveiling that I had a picture of him. The face that it turned out he had was not the one I would have used when beginning to draw the series, as he was harder and meaner looking than I would have supposed at the start. But when it did appear, I did think it was kind of right for him, as he was more Tom Hardy than Leonardo DiCaprio."



Author: Stephen Jewell
Twitter: @stephenjewell
Stephen writes for SFX, Total Film & the Magazine



“Being a kid isn’t actually all fun, and fear, uncertainty, and sadness are present in these little lives. And it was possible to craft a strip that was both an action-packed genre romp, whilst also addressing the quiet darkness of childhood.”

That’s Dan White describing his delightful and disturbing all-ages comic, *Cindy & Biscuit*, featuring the continuing adventures of a butt-kicking girl and her loyal canine companion, fighting to defend their woods from all manner of monstrous creatures. It’s a wonderful comic adventure, but, with the genuinely disturbing elements that White weaves into it, it’s also the perfect kids’ horror comic.

White’s control of emotion and expression gives the reader incredible insight into his characters with so few lines, but also explodes into horror with both the monsters in the woods and the more subtle terrors of daily life. For Cindy, school is hateful, with overly-critical teachers and cruel classmates, and, sadly, her home life is little better, with mom by turns angry,

uncaring, preoccupied or even neglectful. It’s painfully obvious that the bravest thing Cindy does is to stave off the despair of her normal life to go out and save the world once more.

White delights in playing with expectations, encouraging readers to glean multiple meanings from events, wonder where the borders of reality and imagination are, and never afraid to show the bittersweet, even brutal, emotional journey of this young girl. The perfect example of that comes when her Granddad’s tells her, from his hospital bed... “Cindy... look after your mom... and watch out for the woods.” You delight in Cindy’s shocked realisation that she and Biscuit are not alone in their mission but you despair, knowing that joy will turn to despair with her Granddad’s death. So cruel, yet so beautifully done.

But, for truly dark, there’s ‘Cindy’s Dream’, a few short pages shot through with absolute, existential joy and total, shocking horror. Cindy’s dreaming she’s on the moon; “I dream I have a rock. I’d throw it so

hard it would turn into a meteor and blow up the world”. In that moment, the positively beatific expression on Cindy’s face is heartbreaking, her moment of profound joy coming from embracing oblivion. It’s an incredibly powerful and genuinely shocking moment.

White argues that *Cindy & Biscuit* is a kids comic, but one deliberately designed to unnerve, even to scare, something he’s pleased to see children both enjoy and understand, “They seem to love it and that is, honestly, the best feeling. I think they enjoy having a flawed protagonist and they love that she’s such an ass-kicker. But they definitely pick up nuances too which is gratifying. Kids are smart. I think kids should be a bit scared. It’s addictive. You just need to know how far you want to push things and I’ve never made C&B explicit or unpleasant. It’s a gateway horror experience.”

With his new comic, *Sticky Ribs*, White is returning to adult horror, in anthology form, “I wanted to do something directly with my



love of horror, and an anthology of short strips allows me to get formally playful and address all the different types of horror that I love. Each issue will be a double-feature and will go all over the map. I've got a lifetime of stuff bottled up, ready to explode on the page. It's less kid-friendly than C&B but I still see it as a good gateway horror experience. If I can get some kid to watch Cronenberg's 'Rabid' through reading Sticky Ribs, then mission accomplished!"

White's love of comics, and horror, developed early, "Comics has been lifelong really but it was 2000AD that really lit my flame". Describing himself as "a deeply anxious kid", White reveals that he was "endlessly drawn to stuff that scared me, like a moth bouncing off a lightbulb. I realised horror was a multi-faceted experience; I loved cheesy old rubber monster movies, found them almost comforting, but when confronted by the shifting existential terror of an M.R. James story I was left sleepless and terrorised".

Following 2000AD, White's next comics epiphany came through Ted McKeever and Junji Ito, "McKeever's singular, expressionistic Metropolis hit me like a train - such a palpable atmosphere. [But], it wasn't until the comics of Junji Ito (Tomie, Uzumaki, Gyo) that I found a truly scary reading experience".

Reading turned into making, and through self-publishing he found his 'voice', "Realising I could self-publish was a breakthrough as it freed up my style and let me tell the stories I wanted to." But, no matter what style of work he makes, there's a common theme - "Horror crept in quite naturally. I can't keep it out of my work, it seems". This began with Terminus (2008-2010), a single-panel comic that deliberately subverted the comedic expectations of the form. "I wanted to create glimpses into whole other worlds. And not necessarily worlds in which you'd want to hang out too long. By paring down the words and having a single image, I could imply infinite horrors and leave lingering dread in the mind of the reader

without ever being explicit". Following Terminus, White continued the exploration of single-panel comics and adult horror with Insomnia (2010), "It was an attempt to take the single panel comic into even more abstract territory. Something intangible, perverse and unsettling, great fun but a lot of work".

Since starting Cindy & Biscuit in 2011, White's produced four Cindy & Biscuit collections; Cindy & Biscuit Volume 1: We Love Trouble (2014), The Bad Girl Parts 1 & 2 (2015/16), and Sundays (2017). The comic conclusively proves that all-ages comics have a power, not just to delight and thrill, but to unsettle, to unnerve, to disturb. And this wonderful tale, of a girl and her dog, armed with a big stick ("good soldier"), does that is spades.

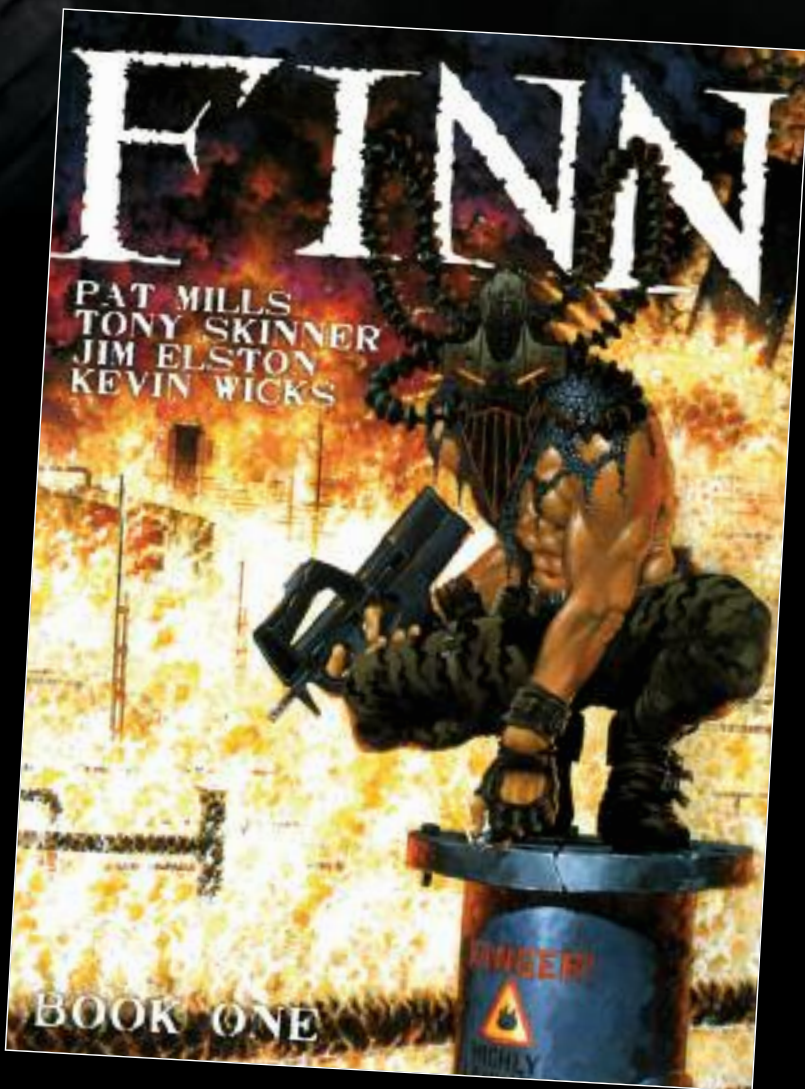
You can find Dan White's work, including Terminus, Insomnia, and his new comic, Sticky Ribs, online at The Mindless Ones (mindlessones.com), Milk The Cat Comics (milkthecat.wordpress.com), and at Deadlight Comics (deadlightcomics.com)

Author: Richard Bruton
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THE LAST WORD

with **Pat Mills**

Tales of Wonder



When I came to write *Slaine* and created its magical Celtic mythos I could have saved myself a great deal of time if I had known about Lord Dunsany and his various fantasy classics such as *The Gods of Pegāna* (1905), *Tales of Wonder* (1916) and *The King of Elfland's Daughter* (1924). Because he was a major influence on every fantasy writer who followed him – H.P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, Arthur C. Clarke, Ursula K. Le Guin, Tolkien, Michael Moorcock, Neil Gaiman; the list is endless. Dunsany truly was a Master of Magic.

Here's a brief excerpt from his *The Bride of the Man-Horse* and you'll see just how influential he was.

In the morning of his two hundred and fiftieth year Shepperalk the centaur went to the golden coffer, wherein the treasure of the centaurs was, and taking from it the hoarded amulet that his father, Jyshak, in the years of his prime, had hammered from mountain gold and set with opals bartered from the gnomes, he put it upon his wrist, and said no word, but walked from his mother's cavern.

Sound familiar? There's plenty more where that came from. Similarly, *The Gods of Pegāna* describes Elder Gods such as Kib, the Sender of Life in all the Worlds. The god of beasts and men. Sish, the Destroyer of Hours. The god of time. Mung, Lord of all Deaths between Pegāna and the Rim. The god of death. Hoodrazai, the Eye in the Waste. The mirthless god who knows the secret of MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI.

So that's where Lovecraft – as he himself acknowledges – drew some of his inspiration. Dammit! Why couldn't the muse that drives me have pointed me in Dunsany's direction like every one else? No, my muse, my inner demons, soul, call it what you will, made it bloody difficult for me by insisting I use real-life magic and real-life entities. So instead, my primary source on *Slaine* was *The Dark Gods* by Anthony Roberts and

Geoff Gilbertson (1980), a truly chilling guide to the occult, followed by the works of various magicians such as Crowley and Kenneth Grant.

I like to think the result in *Slaine* - the Cyth (from *Cythraul*, the Celtic word for Hell) was worth it, not least because these demons were beautifully visualized by Glenn Fabry: a dark pantheon of monsters - the ultraterrestrials - 'pray they don't exist!'

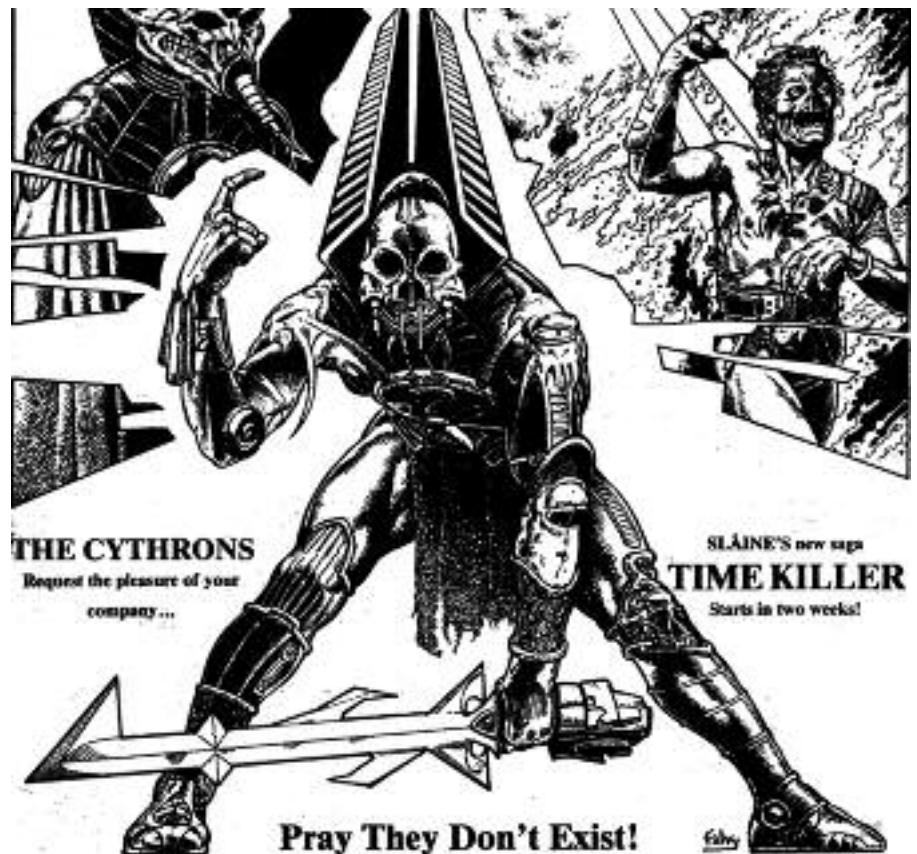
But that was when I became of the magical rule: if you take an interest in the occult, it will take an interest in you. And, sure enough, along came a witch and member of a real life coven, Tony Skinner, who introduced himself to me: 'Enjoyed your *Slaine* stories about the Cythrons. In my pagan tradition we call them the Newts or the Shining Ones. They're heavy dudes. I'll tell you more about them if you like.'

So we ended up writing *Finn* together - the story of a modern day witch and eco-vigilante who battles with the Newts, entities who have been interfering in the affairs of humans since biblical times. As *Finn/Tony* puts it, 'Look at what's wrong in a man and you'll see the webbed footprint of a Newt.'

And I even got to see something of the Cyth/Newts themselves, courtesy of a reader who mysteriously presented me with a thousand page meister work on the Shining Ones and explained that he was told by the ultraterrestrials to get in touch with me. I describe my resulting close encounter of the second kind (thankfully) in *2000AD* and *Judge Dredd*; *The Secret History*.

But it is not an easy road writing about real life magic. As I relate in *The Secret History*, Steve McManus, the editor of *2000AD* protested, 'I can't have a witch writing for *2000AD*!' Magicians were acceptable to Steve, it seems (Alan Moore and Grant Morrison), but witches - no. Apparently there's a class system even in the world of the occult. We don't burn witches anymore, but we do try to ensure that their voices are silenced.

And *Finn*, despite its huge success (it was more popular than *Slaine*) and endless requests from readers has yet to be



reprinted by Rebellion. I gather it may finally be penciled in for publication 2020.

If only I'd read Lord Dunsany and marinated myself in the genius of his brilliant words like other fantasy writers, I could have saved myself all that hard work, research and passive aggression towards my co-author. But then I would never have had true *Tales of Wonder* to write about. *Tales* that, perhaps, provide an alternative for readers who are looking for something other than escapist fantasy.

The truth is, my muse would never have permitted it. It doesn't seem to have the remotest interest in the usual sources of fantasy. Perhaps because it seeks authenticity or perhaps because it doesn't care for the character of writers like Lord Dunsany. After all, this is a man who orders his chauffeur to drive him to Dublin to help suppress the Easter Rising of Irish freedom fighters in 1916. A man who knowingly wrote propaganda (lies) that it is now acknowledged helped prolong the Great

War by several years at the cost of millions of lives.

His equally distinguished writer colleagues (e.g. A.A. Milne) and fellow-propaganda officers, who clearly knew him very well, wrote a short story about his lordship that may not surprise you if you're familiar with the personality of writers.

After one of his stories is rejected by his publisher, Dunsany dies of shock and floats up through the Milky Way, swearing as the stars burn him. Stopping for a nectar in a celestial bar, he looks doubtfully around him at the clearly inferior dead writers who must now keep him company for all eternity. He asks one of them suspiciously, 'Isn't there some mistake?... Is this Heaven?'

Just then God came in and I introduced Dunsany. 'Glad to meet you,' said God. 'Have a cigar?' Then, after a moment's thought, 'Who and what were you?' said he. Then Dunsany knew for certain that he was in Hell.

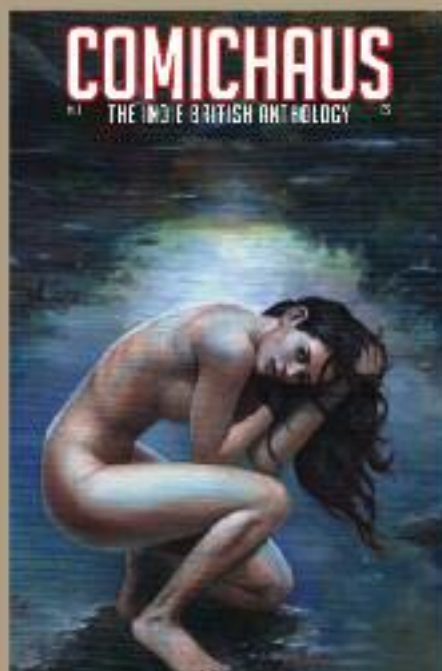
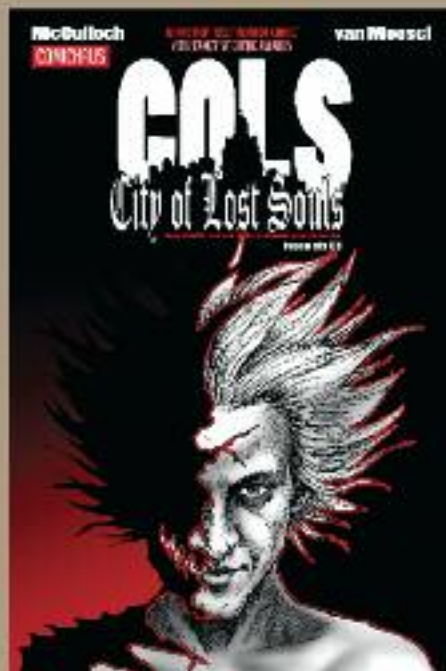
"So we ended up **writing Finn together** - the story of a modern day witch and eco-vigilante who battles with the Newts, entities who have been interfering in the affairs of humans since biblical times"

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