INDIE PUBLISHER!™

MAGAZINE

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EMPRESS



November 2014!



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SELF PUBLISHER MAGAZINE

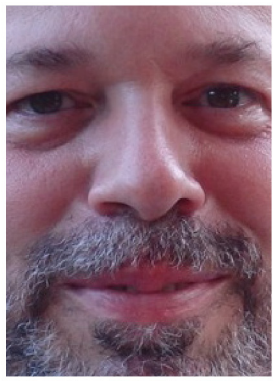
I feel like we're absolutely rushing headlong into 2015. I mean, it's already October as I write this, and I haven't even put up my Halloween decorations yet. I'm about two weeks off; I'm one of those guys that usually have 'em up by September 15th. But the Indyfest website work has really been taking up all of my time, and even with the wonderful strides I've made in getting things ready to go from the alpha stage we've been in since our previous website set up had to be killed (when our server and hosting company pooped on us), we're still not quite there. A couple of main things I need to finish are the setting of the global categories for stores to be able to communicate back and forth over the whole network and then, setting up the template sites that will allow us to attach a set of pre-defined plug-ins that are pre-configured, with network settings in place, so they work instantly. Then, when a publisher or artist opens a new site in the network—boom! All they have to do is add their PayPal address and put up their content.

I have already gotten the public presentation parts pretty well set. There is a News Hub and an Events Hub. The main site serves as the Products/Community Hub. We have in development a Funding Hub, and we are redeveloping the SPA into a Schooling Hub. Of course, we have the Magazine site, and Small Press Idol is waiting in the wings, just waiting for us to activate its power. So we've taken a very segregated-interest approach to the public side of things, which gives those with specific interest the ability to focus on one spot, and the network populates the information from its overall pool, making it easier to manage than ever before, while also doing more than ever before. Readers of SP! have watched as I studied and critiqued what other websites were doing for two years in my columns. The final conclusion from all of my looking and thinking was that there was no place that did everything properly. We don't have all the bases covered yet. I still need to address printing and integrating that into this, for one, but we have built a structure that is stronger than any we've built before, and we're going to put tools into the hands of publishers that are better than any other, hands down, even if simply from the versatility and integrative properties.

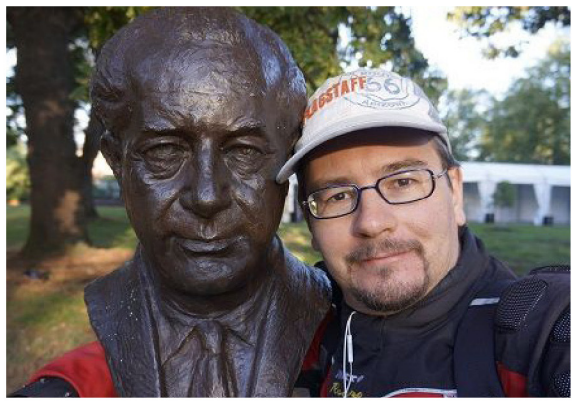
Jay is going to begin working on the template structures, so that the LOOK of what we've got rises to the heights of the FUNCTION. I have specifically built on very simple template bases with as little custom tweaking as possible, so that things are as uncomplicated as possible. For those that have noticed so far: Yes , this is 100 percent Wordpress Multisite—with a set of pro-level plug-ins I paid for with the support of magazine ads. Moving forward, we will be maintaining this structure with the continued support of the wonderful publishers who have made it possible, we have no doubt. For each of them to have gone out and paid for the software we're going to be putting out there individually, well, very few publishers could afford to do that. But working together, we can—and have—changed the face of what will be possible. And now, it's time to focus more and more on what everyone else relies on their publishers to do. The Indyfest revolution is going to be about making all that stuff I talked about above flow out of this magazine, so that it can do what just is not being done anywhere else: make a home for readers to discover new stuff in fun new ways. Enjoy the issue, folks, and pardon the dust! Self Publisher! Magazine is in final meltdown—here comes Indyfest!

- Ian Shires











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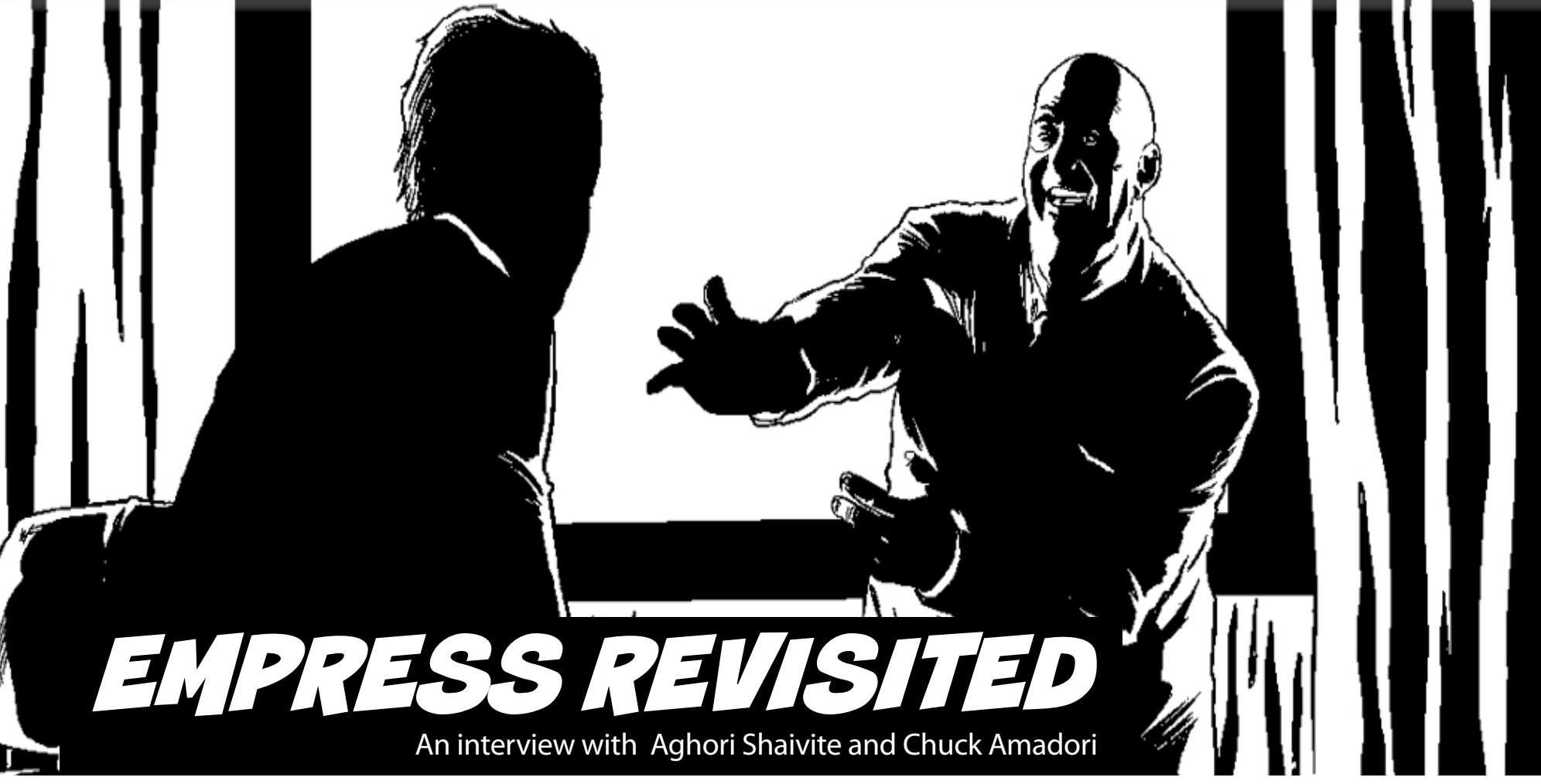
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INDYFEST NETWORK

Opening up for Beta Stage SOON!



EMPRESS REVISITED

An interview with Aghori Shaivite and Chuck Amadori

By Ellen Fleischer

When we last checked in with Aghori Shaivite, back in August, he gave us a quick overview of the titles that comprise his "Aghoriverse" universe. Included in that list was a noir-thriller/horror comic titled Empress. This month, Aghori is back to divulge more details about Empress: the premise, the characters, and the team that's making it happen. Also with us this month is series co-writer Chuck Amadori with his own insights. And be sure to check out the Sneak Peek pages that follow for a taste of what they're talking about.

SP!: FIRST OFF, AGHORI, I'D JUST LIKE TO SAY HOW GREAT IT IS TO HAVE YOU BACK WITH US AGAIN. WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING SINCE WE LAST SPOKE TO YOU IN SP! 76?

AS: Oh, wow… a lot. First off, I've been writing a lot. I got a novel accepted by a great publisher, J. Ellington Ashton Press. I've also written some short stories for their anthologies and plan to do more for them in the future. They're great and really supportive of writers.

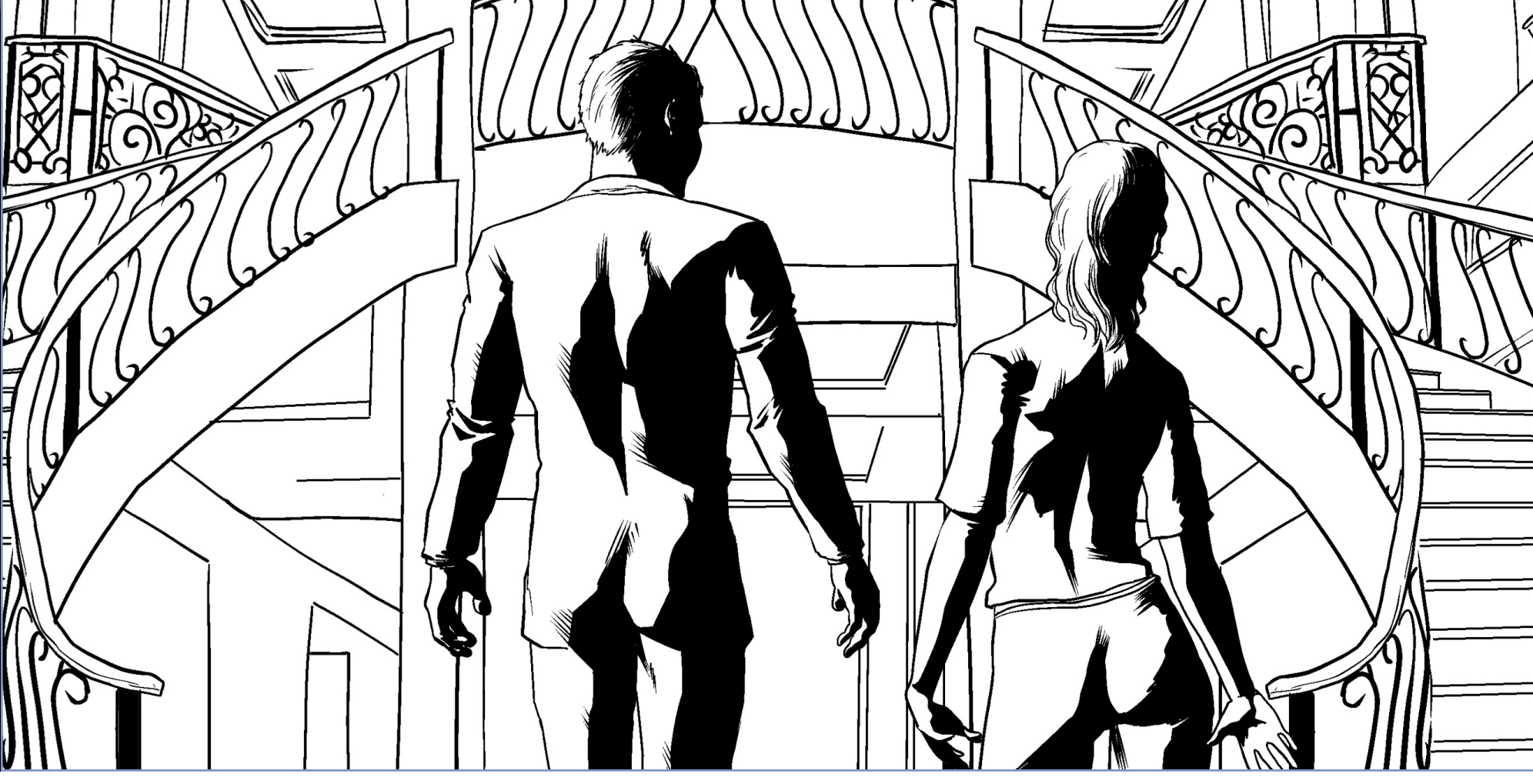
I've been submitting short stories to other publications too, mainly anthologies. I got a story coming out called Heartless in a Wizard of Oz anthology for NonBinary Review. They do a lot of cool collections with new twists and interpretations on old tales. The Heartless story I wrote revolves around the Wicked Witch, one of my favorite childhood characters, and the Tin Man.

I'm still doing my Cruel Production comics. Though I focus more on writing, I use my novice art skills in my fun little webcomic, Cap'N Death, Realm of Death, at www.tapastic.com/series/captaindeath. I wrote a comic for my character Magik Manx called Dark Beginnings and a great artist named Sullivan Suad is drawing on that project. So, I've been growing as a creator, realizing my writing is my real passion, and when it comes to comics, I enjoy collaborating with artists way better than myself.

SP!: WHAT'S YOUR BACKGROUND, CHUCK? HOW DO YOU COME TO BE WRITING COMICS?

CA: I went to school for filmmaking, but grew very frustrated with trying to put together film projects on a limited budget. My transition to comics was simply taking a video series I had been working on and turning it into a comic. This was Pale Dark... which is up to Issue 3 in production now. Once I started rolling on that series, I was hooked on the comic format. I found telling stories in panels and 22-page issues to be extremely fulfilling. In just four months time, I wrote the entire 26-issue Pale Dark series. I then moved on to another project I had worked on in the past... Tether. Tether was to be an animated series I developed with a friend in 2005. But that didn't work out, so I expanded the world and turned it into an epic sci-fi adventure.

In collaboration with the colorist of Tether, Nimesh Morarji, I developed my two Western comic series. Snake was a character he'd tried collaborating with a different writer on. Unfortunately, that writer did not go in the direction Nimesh wanted. I offered to take a stab and make Snake into a real Western with a modern flair. We worked together so well, Nimesh and I decided to collaborate on the other Western series, Bang Bang Lucita. Both series now have Issue 1s complete and are in production on Issue 2.



SP!: HOW DID THE EMPRESS TEAM ASSEMBLE?

AS: Chuck Amadori put out a journal note on DeviantArt asking to collaborate with people. I told Chuck I'd love to collaborate with him. We collaborate as writers—he writes four issues, then I write four issues, and we go back and forth. Pencil Blue Studios provides the art—Marcelo Salaza does the lines, and Matheus Bronca provides the color. This comic project is the one I'm most proud of, as a creator and with my teammates. We really put a hundred percent into it and it's the first time I felt like more than just a fun, home grown indy comic creator. This project is more professional and impressive than the other comic projects I've been a part of, even though I was just getting my feet wet. That's mostly thanks to Chuck and Blue Studio—they're very professional and balanced dudes.

CA: Well... I had been working on my own comic projects, Pale Dark and Tether, when I met Aghori online. We chatted a few times and shared our work with another. We shared a mutual respect for one another and, over time, began talking more frequently. Aghori suggested that we collaborate on a project, which sounded like fun to me. I asked him to show me some of his characters that had very minimal development. Among those was the character named Zia. Right away, I was inspired with a whole back story for the Zia character. So... I began writing the first issue of the series. I decided to introduce the world of Zia through the eyes of a Private Eye named Niles Lance. This way, we could slowly trickle information to the audience, kind of like the narrative style in Citizen Kane. Aghori loved the groundwork I established, so at that time, we decided I would write the first four-issue arc, then he would write the next four-issue arc. With the first issue ready to roll, we hired Marcelo Salaza, with whom I had collaborated with on a past project. Marcelo then brought Matheus Bronca on board from his Pencil Blue Studios to color the series.

SP!: WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE CREATIVE BACKGROUNDS OF THE REST OF THE TEAM?

AS: Chuck writes a lot of great comics and they all look pretty pro level to me. He writes for Pale Dark, Tether, Snake, and Protector Vixi. Pretty sure he writes for a lot of other great projects, as well. Marcelo Salaza not only does art, but he helps manage other artists and gets their work out there. Matheus is an excellent colorist, but I don't know his background as well.

CA: Marcelo Salaza is a penciler/inker from Brazil. He also manages the creative studio Pencil Blue Studios. Matheus Bronca is a colorist affiliated with Pencil Blue. He also dabbles in some digital inking and 3D modeling/rendering.

SP!: NOW, YOU AND CHUCK HAVE BEEN SHARING THE WRITING ON EMPRESS. WHILE WRITING COMICS IS OFTEN A COLLABORATION BETWEEN WRITER AND ARTIST, DID YOU FIND ANY UNIQUE CHALLENGES WORKING WITH ANOTHER WRITER?

AS: Yes, but the challenges were way smaller than I thought. At first, Chuck was worried about how I'd feel with someone taking my creation and doing new things to it, because I created the Zia character. I knew Chuck was a great writer, because I read Pale Dark and other things he did, so I knew that wouldn't be a problem. I like what he did; all the characters he created, and the way he wrote the situations, as well as the events, of the comic. I had a fear that he would question or not like some things in my writing, but we're

both fans of each other. We discuss things to know, for example, not to kill a particular character because we may want to do more with them in the future, or we'll give clues to something we're planning to add to the story during our writing turn. So, we've handled this very civilly; we like each other's writing, and we're very supportive of each other. This has made the process way more smooth than challenging.

CA: At first, I was worried it would be a "butting of heads" battle. However, it's been great. Aghori gave me the keys to this character, to pretty much do what I wanted in the first four issues. In turn, I did the same for him on the next arc, and then he gave me the keys back for the third arc and so on and so on...

SP!: WERE THERE ANY CHANGES THAT EITHER OF YOU ENDED UP MAKING TO THE STORYLINE, BASED ON WHAT THE OTHER CAME UP WITH?

AS: Oh yeah. We never know what either of us will fully come up with, because we're both collaborating on the story as we go along. There are some set things, but it's a creative process, and we're building the story step by step. So, Chuck will write something and I bounce off of that, adding my spins and interpretations, then he does the same. We get inspired by each other and what we add to the story.

CA: Aghori mentioned to me about what he was imagining for the fourth arc, so I made sure to make the third arc end in a spot that would work good for him. I'd like to think the things I did with the characters and story helped inspire the direction Aghori ultimately took with his arcs.

SP!: WHAT IS YOUR TEAM'S CREATIVE PROCESS? CAN YOU LAY OUT THE STEPS FROM IDEA TO PRODUCTION?

AS: First, the scripts are written. Marcelo does page layouts and sketches. Then, he draws the comic on the computer. Matheus colors it. Then, when an entire issue's done, we compile it in a PDF or whatever format a retailer requires. We put physical POD and digital copies of Empress on islesquaredcomics.indyplanet.com. We're also on Comixology, Amazon, and other sites. We do this issue by issue.

CA: For the first arc I had the key plot points in my head. So, I plotted them out in a way that I felt offered some mystery for the reader. I hate comics that race through the plot and spill the beans right away. Although, I have noticed that some audience members (reviewers) prefer that Michael Bay style. Sorry to say (more like glad to say), that's not the way we do things. As far as my method of writing a script goes, I write a very detailed outline that includes all the dialogue I want to include and actions. Then I put it into script format, refining it along the way. Dialogue is never final until I letter it on the finished page.

SP!: HOW DID THE DISAPPEARANCE OF AMELIA EARHART INFORM YOUR PLOT?

CA: I know it was important for Aghori's initial premise, but it wasn't on my mind too much as I developed the first arc. I definitely took from the "era," though.



AS: When I was a kid, I loved reading about unsolved mysteries. The possibilities of what happened to Amelia Earhart interested me.

A few years ago, I created this character named Zia. I thought about Amelia, how she disappeared, and it influenced me to create an old school, 20s/30s starlet who disappears on an adventure. Zia goes through a bizarre transformation due to her disappearance, and we find out just how weird things get in each issue of Empress.

SP!: YOU'VE DESCRIBED EMPRESS AS A "NOIR-THRILLER HORROR COMIC". CARE TO ELABORATE FURTHER?

AS: Chuck is inspired by noir cinema—Citizen Kane and other classics. He actually put me onto Citizen Kane, along with another friend of mine, and I love it. We also love noir comics and crime dramas with a mix of mystery. Ed Brubaker is probably the best example of an influence I can think of. We wanted to make an old-school story with noirish elements. Since Zia is a supernatural character and we have many fantastical elements set in a slightly realistic and familiar world, we wanted to write a dark story with her. I grew up in a household with horror and thriller entertainment, so they are natural genres for me to include in my stories.

CA: With the first arc, I wanted it to feel like an old film-noir thriller. You know, with the heavy shadows, chiaroscuro lighting, bordering on corny dialogue (calling girls "doll" and "dame," etc.). The horror element will come into play as we learn what Zia really is and the world she encompasses.

SP!: WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE CHARACTERS? WHO ARE THEY? WHAT DRIVES THEM?



AS: Niles is one of the first main characters introduced. He's a private investigator, trying to figure out what happened to Zia. He travels with Rose, a woman who worked for the same movie studio Zia worked at. She's loyal to the studio and her job, so she helps Niles out. There's the producer that hires Niles, a man close to Zia like a father. He cares about Zia, but he's also trying to get her back in time for a movie premiere. Then, there're a bunch of crazy gremlins Zia keeps seeing everywhere. They're driven by something else entirely. Empress is an acid trip that would make Syd Barrett proud.

CA: All I'll say is, don't get too attached to certain characters... you never know what could happen.

SP!: SO, HOW HAS THE STORY PLAYED OUT SO FAR?

CA: I'll avoid spoilers as much as possible. Broad strokes of the arcs… Volume 1–The search is on for Zia. Niles learns some interesting things about Zia's past that lead him to the epicenter of Zia's world. Volume 2 –Explores the distant past hinted in the first arc, while tying into the first arc to wrap it up with a nice (bloody) bow. Volume 3 –Examines the impact Zia had on WWII and the war in the Pacific. Some key historical figures will have a role in the adventures. Volume 4 –The culmination of the gods and goddess finally comes to the forefront.

AS: It starts out with a lot of mystery, more questions than answers. Before you know it, clarity comes and you're knee deep in blood, gore, and a strange, new mythology. We have historical elements, where we go far back in time to discover exactly who or what Zia is. Chuck and I have pretty much butchered history for fun with this comic... If no one shows up in a time machine to kick our asses, I'll be surprised.

SP!: HEH. SINCE THIS IS AN ONGOING, CAN YOU TEASE ABOUT ANY FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS? WHERE DO YOU SEE THE STORY GOING OVER THE NEXT LITTLE WHILE?

CA: As mentioned previously, we will be going way back in time and playing with the recent past.

AS: We're many scripts in so far… and I can guarantee things get crazier with each issue. Zia finds her destiny is way stranger than just being a film diva. Warriors pop up from a variety of historical cultures. Beings beyond our comprehension weave through the fabrics of existence. Conflicts become super intense. Sexual politics are slightly veiled, but obvious. I was keeping this secret, but I plan on displaying a less wordy, more veiled "counter-argument" throughout the series to Dave Sim's views on women as presented in Cerebus. Just for fun.

SP!: AS EMPRESS IS PART OF YOUR "AGHORIVERSE" UNIVERSE, WILL IT BE LINKING TO SOME OF YOUR OTHER TITLES? HAS IT ALREADY DONE SO?

AS: I've thought about it, but Chuck and I have created something of our own together and other things may not fit. I don't want to link it to other series I'm doing, but I have thought about doing cameos of other Aghoriverse characters. My only problem is that if we were to get a deal, or a bigger publisher likes my comic, copyright has to come into question. I want to own all my characters, so it would depend on if I could still own my stuff or not. At this point, since we're self-published, it would be most ideal now to do cameos, but you never know what can happen….

CA: Nothing firm yet... however... the Aghoriverse is vast... so chances are high. Especially with the creation of the Aghori Asylum in Issue 2.

SP!: IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE THAT YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE THAT WE HAVEN'T TOUCHED ON?

AS: Chuck Amadori is hands down the best writer I've collaborated with. Character development, plots, cliffhangers—I learn a lot working with him. We're happy to have such talented artists as Pencil Blue Studios bringing our comics to life and I'm honored to be working with them.

CA: Issue 01 is now on ComiXology here: http://cmxl.gy/1oOo8hS or in print at www.islesquaredcomics.indyplanet.com

SP!: SO, I'M THINKING THAT THE NEXT QUESTION OUGHT TO BE, HOW DO WE GET OUR HANDS ON THE NEXT ISSUE? (AND ON PREVIOUS ISSUES THAT WE MIGHT HAVE MISSED!)

AS: http://Islesquaredcomics.indyplanet.com for Empress and any of Chuck's comics. And, as Chuck just said, Empress is also up at Comixology, now.

SP!: AND HOW CAN WE KEEP UP WITH THE AGHORIVERSE, YOU AND THE REST OF YOUR TEAM, AND ANY NEW DEVELOPMENTS COMING DOWN THE PIPELINE?

AS: Check out my Aghoriverse comics at http://aghorishaivite.indyplanet.com and hit me up on twitter @aghorishaivite, or on Facebook at http://facebook.com/aghori.shaivite. I also post my updates on http://aghoriverse.com. Thank you!!!

CA: My creative imprint is Isle Squared Comics. I have some books on ComiXology and you can get them on Indy Planet www.islesquaredcomics.indyplanet.com my official site is www.islesquaredcomics.com. I'm also on Facebook, Tumblr, DeviantArt = IsleSquaredComics. Twitter @zarran67.

SP!: THANKS SO MUCH!






ISLE²
1
AMADORI
SALAZA
BRONCA
EMPRESS
SNEAK PEEK!
SALAZA 2014

SNEAK PEEK!

EMPRESS

MY DEAR...

I'M AFRAID YOUR BROTHER DIDN'T REALLY DIE IN THE FIRE...

HE IS--

...MY BROTHER *LIVES*?

TELL ME WHERE HE IS!

BANG!!

...YOU?!

The End

KILL THE PROJECTOR.

...AND THAT'S ALL WE HAVE...

WE'RE MISSING THE FINAL *CRUCIAL* SCENE.

http://www.islesquaredcomics.com/empress.html

SNEAK PEEK!

EMPRESS

YOU MUST FIND ZIA...

THE FUTURE OF SILVER SCREEN STUDIOS DEPENDS ON IT.

WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME?

WELL... ZIA IS A BIT OF AN ADVENTURER.

...TAKES A LOT OF RISKS...

TOO MANY IF YOU ASK ME.

SHE AND HER 'LEADING MAN OF THE MONTH' LEFT FOR...

WELL, SHE DIDNT TELL US.

I SEE. TELL ME, MISTER COHN...

WAS SHE ALWAYS SO SECRETIVE?

THAT'S ZIA. SHE KNOWS THAT THE STUDIO WOULD NEVER ALLOW HER RISKY GETAWAYS...

ESPECIALLY IN THE MIDDLE OF A PRODUCTION.

EMPRESS

SNEAK PEEK!











EMPRESS

SNEAK PEEK!

I HAVE TO ADMIT, YOU AREN'T THE FIRST P.I. I'VE HIRED.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE OTHER DICKS?

I DON'T KNOW.

THEY TOOK OUR MONEY AND JUST DISAPPEARED.

THAT'S WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU HIRE AMATEURS.

NEVERTHELESS...

SINCE WE'RE INVESTING A GREAT DEAL OF MONEY INTO YOUR SERVICES...

I MUST INSIST YOU TAKE A SILVER SCREEN INTERN ALONG WITH YOU.

ABSOLUTELY NOT...

I DON'T NEED SOME GREEN KID SLOWING ME DOWN!

ROSE WILL ACCOMPANY YOU. AND REPORT IN WITH ME REGULARLY.

I SUPPOSE I COULD MAKE AN EXCEPTION THIS ONCE...


OLD SOLDIERS
ZEIN
TRAIL
WINTER CITY
EXPERIENCE
THE ALL NEW
CLOUD 9 COMIX
ON IOS,
ANDROID &
KINDLE FIRE
THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE GALLOWS
THE MIGHTY TITAN
JINN WARRIORS
DYNAGIRL
INFINITY
CLOUD 9 COMIX

A WRITTEN VIEW



What is your CIQ?

By Douglas Owen

It's a question I field all the time. "How are you so creative with your stories?" Not that I am creative. I just have a high creative IQ.

DO YOU HAVE A HIGH CREATIVE IQ?

Well, there is a relationship between creativity and intelligence. Most people who are creative are also intelligent, but not all intelligent people are creative. In order to break this down, let us look at the definition of Intelligence.

Webster's Concise Dictionary of the English Language says:

- Intelligence 1: The ability to exercise mental functions. 2: The ability to grasp the significant factors of a complex problem or new situation. 3: Information acquired or communicated; news. 4: The gathering of secret information, esp. of a political or military nature. 5. A group of persons assigned to gather such secret information. 6: An intelligent being.

For our purposes we will take the second definition.

Intelligence is gauged by the ability to interpret information, as well as provide solutions. It demonstrates the ability to memorize concepts and repeat the results. If I tell you 4+4=8, you can use your intelligence to deduce that 2+2=4.

One question you may have is when you can use intelligence to deduce, would that not be creativity? No, creativity would be to deduce that 2X2=4, or that 4 is a number of infinite value if accompanied by another number. It is the ability to look beyond reason. You need intelligence to be creative, but you don't need creativity to be intelligent.

Let us sink this home.

Ever been at a party with many interesting people talking about things you know nothing about? I'm not talking about those people who talk about other people, I'm talking about the ones who are having philosophical discussions about God, the universe, if there is life on other planets, the big bang theory (not the TV show), or life in general. When walking around, have you ever seen the one person standing alone somewhere that no one will talk to? They could be the one with the pocket protector and braces at the age of 30, but they are recognizable. You turn away and run. How about talking to them? Because after about five minutes of their inane chatter about the nano-engineering project they are working on, you realize they are the most boring person on the face of the Earth.

This is the difference between intelligence and creative intelligence. Don't put the poor person down; they are superiorly intelligent, but just not very interesting.

So how do you keep from being that person whom no one talks to? Raise your creative intelligence.

How do you do that? Can you do that? Is there a pill I should take?

Easy, yes, and no.

Let's see what you have, first. Here is a question for you. How many uses can you think of for a rubber band? Take 10 minutes and write them down.

GO!

Okay, how many did you get? Twenty? Impressive? Okay, let's see what you have.

Most people will end up with about 20 different ways to use a rubber band. Roll newspaper, hold letters, use as projectiles, hold books together, hold spices together, and so on. If you thought of over 20 different ways then you did good. Did you think about using a rubber band between two pegs to hold your shoes? How about something more obscure, like using rubber bands to make a blanket? How about making a pen for your pet? The more uses you came up with the greater your creative intelligence is.

Don't believe me? Think of the great inventors of the last 100 years. Do you think they have creative intelligence? You betcha.

But, do you need a high creative intelligence to write effective novels? No, you just need a manic personality and free time. Persistence will get your novel finished and revised 100 times (if not more). But to be a memorable author, the answer is yes, you need a high creative intelligence. Agatha Christie is one of those memorable authors who pioneered plot ideas that are now considered clichés, but they were brilliant and original at the time. Here is a list of some of them:

> Conspirators act as if they are enemies in order to confuse the detective
>
> The obvious suspect is the murderer, but everyone likes him, so they give him an alibi
>
> A murderer fakes an attack against himself, to exonerate himself
>
> A murderer admits freely that he's the most obvious suspect, having opportunity, means and motive
>
> A coincidence seems suspicious, but turns out to be a coincidence after all
>
> The person writing the story is the murderer themselves.
>
> And so on.

Nothing is original anymore.

In the late 1800s, Georges Polti discovered only 36 dramatic situations in stories around the world. It means chances are slim. But stories can still have twists.

Try to open your chapter with a protagonist who just killed a man (no, not the Queen song, but nice try). Kathy Reichs did this in her novel Bare Bones. After the murder, she flashes back. At about 200 pages we catch up with the story and the entire chapter is repeated word for word. This is called the echo structure. It works.

Val McDermid introduced plot twists in her Tony Hill novels. These twists are so ingenious that we are left gasping.

Eleanor Catton starts with slow and long scenes in The Luminaries, but each chapter becomes progressively shorter, and faster. Is this an original structure? Yes. And it works.

One suggestion for developing a high creative intelligence is to make a habit of the "what if" game. If you are not aware of this game, here are the basics. I'll give you a starting point, or description of a short scene and you complete it. Ready?

> Start writing a story in the first person and tell the reader that you can see them. Write about it.
>
> You look in the mirror and your reflection smiles and waves back at you.
>
> You mail a letter, only to have the postman return it within an hour marked "returned: moved".
>
> You turn on the TV and it says you've watched enough today and turns off.

Great little openers, but how can you explain such scenarios? This I leave to you. You can email a comment to me regarding your ideas at spm@daowen.ca. I can't promise to get back to you quickly, but I'll do my best to respond to everyone who emails me.

John Franklin Bardin is a master of the game. He wrote The Deadly Percheron (1947), where a man visits his psychiatrist and tells him he's being followed by leprechauns. Of course the doctor smiles, but then he meets the leprechauns.

The novel is not a fantasy. Try and figure out a convincing explanation.

Here's another "what if". What if you emailed me about this article? And you told me you found an original idea for your story. Now that's a great creative challenge.



Wayward Raven Media
Mark C. Frankel



By Steve Pennella

Wayward Raven Media was formed when Aegis Creative Enterprises grew beyond its original mission of providing creative content to the comic book and film industries. After launching at the New York Comicon in 2012, it became clear that additional horizons would be sought by expanding into prose and children's book publishing ,along with a web comic called Damn Heroes.

The company is helmed by Mark C. Frankel (CEO/COO), Alexander Sapountzis (CTO/Creative Director), and Joshua Lee Andrew Jones (Editor-in-Chief). They are located in the NY-Metro Area.

Mark C. Frankel, CEO/COO of Wayward Raven Media has worked in Entertainment/Media for over ten years. He is a creator of comics (web and print), writer of prose, and freelance editor. As a writer, you'd think he would have more to say about himself, but he prefers to be a man of mystery (domestic, not international). Still, he swears he isn't afraid to stand up in front of a crowd and talk until they throw rotten fruit. For the purpose of this interview, he's going to leave his comfort zone and enter the Ask Me Anything world of Self Publisher! Magazine. We'll be joined by his colleagues...

Joshua Lee Andrew Jones, Editor-in-Chief Josh is a writer of novels, screenplays, comic books, and poetry, with a penchant for wandering in both mind and body. You can get one of his novels free as an incentive. His work is available on Amazon: http://www.amazon.com/Joshua-Jones/e/B004WG5KKS He can be followed on Twitter at @JLAJones

Alexander Sapountzis (SAH-POON-ZEES), CTO/Creative Director of Wayward Raven Media, illustrator of Damn Heroes is a man of few words, mostly because they get him into more trouble. Unable to decide whether to code or draw professionally, he does both. Alex's web presence includes http://damnheroes.com/, Twitter @asapountzis and LinkedIn http://www.linkedin.com/in/sapountzis

SP!: CAN YOU GIVE US A BRIEF HISTORY OF AEGIS ENTERTAINMENT, THE PREDECESSOR OF WAYWARD RAVEN MEDIA? WHAT KIND OF CONTENT DID AEGIS PRODUCE?

MCF: Josh and I started Aegis Creative Enterprises. We had been writing stage plays and quickly found that we were in the wrong industry. Neither one of us had any aspirations to step upon a stage (although I do find that I personally enjoy speaking in front of crowds, mostly extemporaneously), and that seems to be a large driving force behind the typical playwright. In that, it is much like the comic book industry – if you aren't willing to do it yourself, you are likely in the wrong place.

Comics, on the other hand, were something that we both enjoyed. It is an often underappreciated medium, at least until one realizes that most of the movies from the last decade or so have their roots in sequential panels. It isn't just superhero movies; flicks like The Road to Perdition and A History of Violence started out as comics. I personally grew up reading Spider-Man, The X-Men, Superman, Thor, and just about anything else I could get my hands on. So, when we discussed other mediums for the types of stories we like (Classical Mythology, Science Fiction, Horror, Fantasy), comic books seemed a much more natural fit, particularly because our ideas require significantly less capital to illustrate than to attempt on stage. Otherwise, the budgets border on the astronomical.

Aegis quickly transitioned from plays to comics. Some of our present comics were born from ideas or scripts we had for stage plays. In the beginning, there was a lot of trial and error. It took us two tries to find the right artist for our first book, Horsemen. Another book, O, is part of our Signed series and, although it was written first, it has yet to be illustrated, in part due to an artist quitting on us.

SP!: WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES BROUGHT ABOUT THE REINVENTION OF AEGIS TO WAYWARD RAVEN?

MCF: Two things happened. One, Alex joined us. He and I met and hit it off pretty quickly, due mainly to our love of comics. In one of the conversations we had, I pitched him an idea about a town full of overly-righteous superheroes and one normal guy. I think he added the idea of making it a webcomic and expressed interest in illustrating it. From there, we got Damn Heroes.

And two, almost no one correctly pronounces Aegis ("E-jis." Go ahead, be honest, did you get it right when you first saw it?). It is a really cool concept, basically a shield imbued with Athena's protection and the head of the Gorgon, but that is lost on anyone who stumbles over the word. Our PR representative pointed that out in one of our conversations.

Suddenly, we found that we were more than just a couple guys who made a comic book. Now we were producing a webcomic, comics, novels, shirts, stickers, and ultimately looking to get into other forms of media, like TV or movies. It was pretty clear that if people couldn't pronounce our name, we didn't have a shot at getting them to buy our stuff, no matter how cool it might be.

SP!: YOU STUDIED COMMUNICATIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH AND YOUR PROFESSIONAL HISTORY — BOTH CURRENT AND PRIOR TO WAYWARD RAVEN — INCLUDES RECRUITING TALENT, HR RESPONSIBILITIES, AND STAFFING. YOU SEEM WELL PREPARED TO TAKE ON THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF CEO/COO OF WAYWARD RAVEN MEDIA. CAN YOU TELL US HOW YOUR PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND WILL HELP YOU BUILD THE WAYWARD RAVEN BRAND?

MCF: Having the right people is probably the most critical thing to the success of any business. Recognizing, developing, and recruiting talent is imperative, not just in the people we may employ, but also in our business partners. We work with a host of artists, go to many conventions each year, and utilize tons of services, from printers to technology platforms to apparel makers. One poor decision or bad relationship can deeply damage a growing press, just as certainly as one bad product can turn customers away forever.

Additionally, good business is about good relationships. In the comic book industry that is more true than anywhere else. Never have I seen a business in which competitors will tell prospective customers





about another merchant's product, even if it competes directly with them. Not only do I see it at comic book conventions routinely, I engage in it. In the comic book industry, we realize we are all in it together. It takes a long time to build a publishing brand. We aren't anonymously throwing a half-thought-out product into the app store, hoping some folks will buy it; we're putting our names and faces on our products. Bad relationships WILL sink our business.

I truly believe my time in HR and recruiting has taught me how to foster good relationships. Throw in my desire to constantly learn and grow, and I think that at least gets me on the right path to a thriving business. Having people like Alex and Josh who I can trust and who each bring a unique ability and perspective to the business, gives us a real chance achieving everything we've set out to do.

SP!: CAN YOU GIVE US AN EXAMPLE OF HOW YOUR PROFESSIONAL LIFE HELPS YOUR COMIC/PUBLISHING ENDEAVORS?

MCF: Besides the above examples, I've found that having worked in the media industry for over a decade has given me a good understanding of what it takes for such a business to succeed. I'm constantly watching trends, seeing how others handle problems that confront us, and frequently meeting people who can directly help, join, or counsel us. Having access to senior people in the media business has given me a glimpse of things that I could not possibly have learned if I only touched one aspect of a business. HR folks go everywhere and learn about everything. I met Alex because I was interviewing him. Additionally, we will have a book out next year illustrated by someone else I interviewed and hired.

SP!: HOW DO YOU BALANCE YOUR DAY JOB LIFE, YOUR FAMILY LIFE AND YOUR WAYWARD RAVEN MEDIA LIFE? WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHER INDEPENDENT CREATORS THAT AREN'T INDEPENDENTLY WEALTHY, AND HAVE DAY JOBS AND REAL WORLD RESPONSIBILITIES?

MCF: It is a constant juggling act and my wife should receive the lion's share of the credit for it. She has given me a lot of freedom to follow my dream.

Scheduling appropriately is critical. Having a schedule you can stick to is the only realistic way to accomplish anything. I have a routine





that I do my best not to deviate from: wake up, hit the gym, write or do Wayward Raven business on the train, attend my day job, social media or other WWR stuff on the way home on the train, see the family, finish out the day with anything else I need to do for the business. I'm actually writing this after 11:00 on a Wednesday night. The weekends are usually family time, but I work on them as well, often travelling and, in some cases, I find myself away for days at a time.

In truth, fledgling creators should just assume that every waking moment that isn't working a day job should be dedicated to growing their business. If you don't love what you are doing enough to dedicate that much time and energy to it, stop. This career isn't for you.

SP!: HOW DID YOU ALL MEET UP?

MCF: I met Josh through mutual friends and found we had a lot in common. We both grew up in Fairfield, CT, were avid Steelers fans, mainly because our mothers grew up in the Pittsburgh area, and found subjects like literature, art, music and philosophy fascinating. We hit it off pretty quickly.

As for Alex, he knew I was a comic book fan immediately when he saw books piled on my desk. As he'll tell you, I met him when I was recruiting him for a job. Although we did discuss the important aspects of the position, we probably spent most of the time talking about comics. Those conversations continued once I hired him.

AS: Mark actually recruited me in my day job as a web developer and we spent most of the interview talking about comics. During downtime, we'd often talk about comics and joke about comic books or pop culture. In passing conversation, he mentioned he was a writer, and I mentioned I was an artist, and we started talking about possibly collaborating on what eventually became Damn Heroes.

JLAJ: We met through a friend and began having conversations on topics we both shared an interest in, including art, literature, speculative fiction, and Monty Python. From there, we started to hang out and our conversations evolved. Sometimes they led to ideas that begged to be developed into something more. So the writing began. We started by writing plays, as our ideas were derived from conversational sources. Over the years, comic books came to the forefront, as they are a form we both enjoyed from childhood, but had only recently revisited. They were the perfect platform to combine our interests and they became the vehicle of expression that allowed the freedom of thought that most fulfilled our evolving conditions.

SP!: YOU'VE BEEN ACTIVE IN THE CONVENTION CIRCUIT OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS. HOW DO YOU DIFFERENTIATE YOURSELVES FROM OTHER CREATORS SELLING THEIR WARES IN A TYPICAL ARTIST ALLEY?

MCF: I try to talk to everyone. If I catch your eye (and often even if I don't), I'll make an attempt to engage you. We've made plenty of sales to someone who was initially going to pass us by without looking, simply because I said hello. At our very first convention, one of the industry professionals next to me asked me when I would learn that not everyone is a sale. My response was "Never" and I believe it. Every person wants to buys something, it's just a matter of finding out what and how your product relates to them. Much like interviewing, open ended questions often lead to ways of getting the person to pick up one of our products and buy it.

Over the years, our pitches have been adapted and improved and I'm always learning new ways to do things. All three of us are very much in sync with each other by now and the work is almost seamless during conventions.

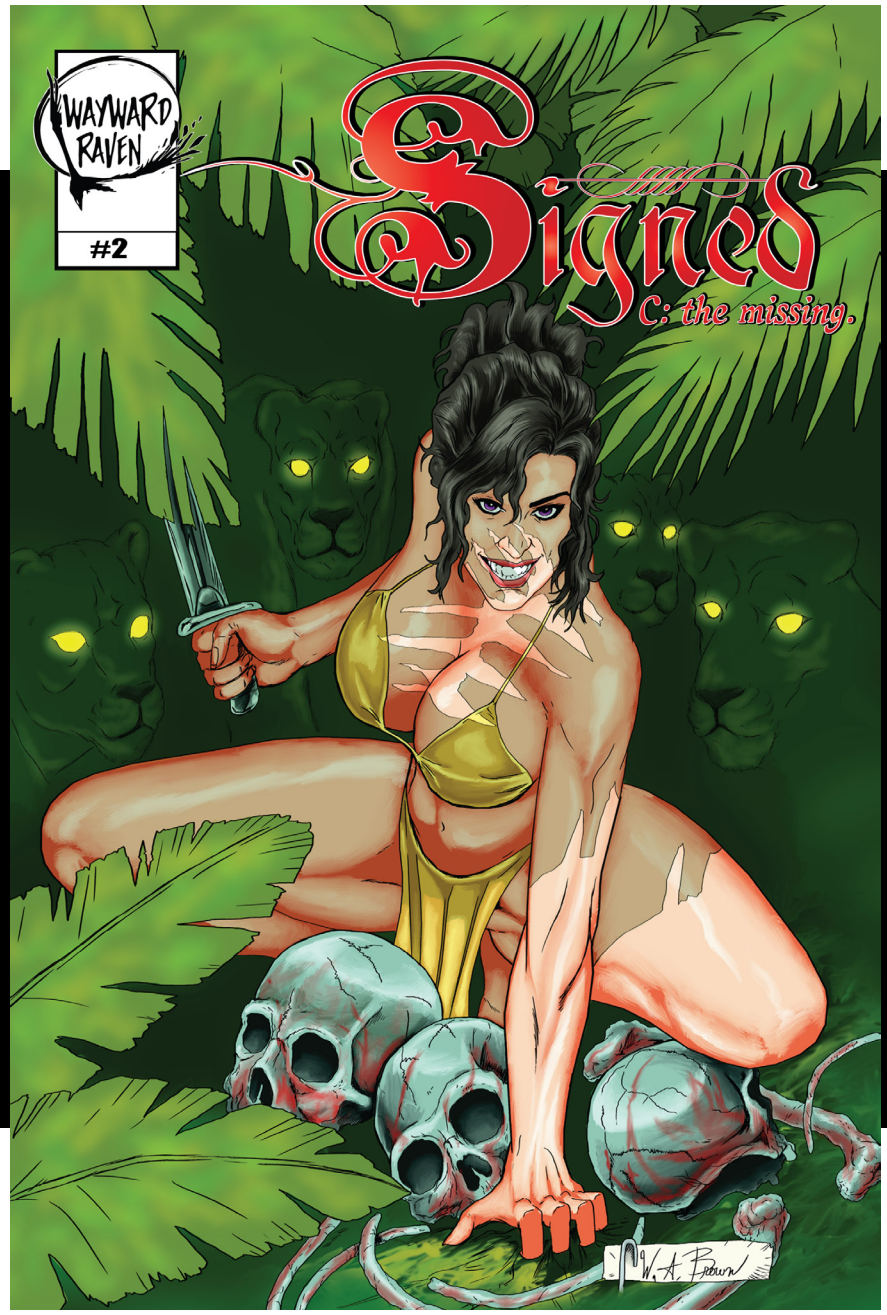
AS: I think what sets us apart is how we work together and what products we're selling. Since there's three of us, each with distinct personalities and voices, we can appeal to different interests. Also, I've noticed that for the most part, many other creators tend to sell a single "type" of item at their tables, whereas we tend to have a wider variety, from all-ages material to books for a more mature palate.

JLAJ: With a silly walk... To be serious, it is difficult to differentiate, as there are common elements to the process entire. For one, everyone is selling similar products though varying in quality. There are ground rules established by the venue, so we must adhere to them, so there are limitations to physical advertisement. There is courtesy. Some do not feel strongly about this, but being a good convention neighbor is something we strive for as, in the beginning, we experienced how a bad neighbor can cause undue stress, which can lead to a poor sales performance.

What we try to do is understand our environment. Know the region and the general history of comic books sales. The information is there if you do the research. Also, if there is a certain individual of renown who is bringing in a specific audience, then cater to the audience with a specially-designed product. For us, it is usually in the form a print. That leads to also knowing the current trends. We try to stay on top of that and provide a product that can capitalize on things such as hit movies.

The things that really differentiate us are our experiences as a group and that we have a well-developed business plan for growth, as we adapt to conditions of culture and economy. Together, we bring skills and experience that many simply don't have, because we come from different backgrounds in business, education, literature, technology and more. Many are highly specialized in artist alley, they are artists or writers who wish to do nothing more than that, which is awesome. I wish them luck, but this can be a limitation. We accept our limitations as individuals and work as a group. Also, we're not out there to be discovered by DC, Image, Dark Horse or Marvel... We are there to become their equal. So, ego has something to do with it, too.





SP!: WHAT DO YOU DO TO GET PEOPLE TO VISIT YOUR BOOTH THAT OTHER VENDORS MAY NOT?

MCF: Besides doing whatever we can to engage the audience, we are always trying new things. For the last couple of conventions, we have had ten-foot tall banners. They tend to stick out, since everyone else's are about six feet. I'm sure that will change as more people start getting the same type of banner we have, probably forcing us to try something new. Anything we can do to stay on the cutting edge. This year at NYCC (New York Comicon), my sister, who is an award winning visual and interior designer, is going to design and set up the booth. So far, she has presented some pretty cool ideas that I can't wait to see come to life.

AS: Anything we possibly can! Mark is our dedicated pitch guy, using his experience in recruiting and sales to get the basic premise of our books into the minds of attendees. Josh is very cerebral, knows how to make the booth more enticing to attendees, and comes up with some clever ideas to guide traffic towards our booth. I tend to be more of a prankster, so I'll notice someone in a particular costume or geeky t-shirt and call out to them with something appropriately amusing to engage them. I also tend to work on artwork or sketch cards, and this often attracts attention, as people may be interested in seeing what I'm working on.

JLAJ: Strong social media activity and we have a press agent who sends out releases about our major appearances. And we have a Mark.

SP!: HOW DIFFERENT IS THE NYCC EXPERIENCE, COMPARED TO A SMALLER UP-AND-COMING SHOW, LIKE THE CONNECTICUT COMICONN? I ASSUME NO ONE'S TOSSED ROTTEN FOOD IN YOUR DIRECTION.

MCF: NYCC is an entity all unto itself. I haven't done San Diego, but it seems like nothing else gets even close to those two shows. I understand over 100,000 people were there last year. I'd expect about the same this year.

Beyond that, I've noticed that shows do tend to have a bit of local flavor to them. HeroesCon (in Charlotte) is a pretty big show and it really was all about the comics. I had more in-depth conversations

with folks at Heroes than I did at some of the shows in the Northeast. I think those differences are what make each show unique and fun to attend.

Very funny. So far, no one has thrown fruit at me, although I suppose there is always a first time. Nice to see someone reads our bios.

AS: Mostly I've noticed that smaller shows tend to be focused on comics or collectibles or one particular "thing", whereas larger cons are more geared towards pop culture as a whole. Bigger shows tend to have more foot traffic (obviously) but the attendees are more overwhelmed and tend to run by rather than stopping to sit and talk.

Thus far, we've not had rotten food tossed at us, but I have been abused by the random Harley Quinn cosplayer from time to time. I suffer for my art.

JLAJ: Scale. Scope... People pretty much act the same at every con, large or small. Mostly they are well behaved. This is a testament to the comic book convention fans, who are an educated and enthusiastic bunch. Yes, there are those who deviate from ideal behavior, but in any group, there are outliers and fiends. Setup is the big difference, as we have a small press booth, which is more elaborate. This takes a longer time than normal. We do this because getting eyes on books is hard at NYCC, because of the competition.

SP!: YOU HAVE SUBMISSIONS GUIDELINES ON YOUR HOME PAGE. DO YOU GET A LOT OF TRAFFIC?

AS: As the web guy and CTO, I can chime in on this. Submissions can be found at http://waywardraven.com/submissions/.

As for web traffic, on average, we tend to have about 600 monthly uniques on WaywardRaven.com, and about 800 on DamnHeroes.com, although with the later, that's mostly on Wednesdays, when we launch a new strip.

MCF: One of our goals is to continue to grow that number. As we do more conventions and put out more books, I'm sure we will, but I expect it to take time. Josh has done a fantastic job growing out social media presence (currently over two thousand followers on Twitter); it is only a matter of time until that starts to spill over to the website more often.

SP!: WHAT CAN YOU OFFER TO OTHER CREATORS THAT OTHER INDEPENDENT PUBLISHERS CAN'T?

MCF: It is important to us that we are putting out a quality book through and through. We've been doing this for awhile now and, although I don't think we know it all, it is safe to say we've got a pretty good handle on things. I'd like to think our products reflect that.

Experience aside, the number one thing going for us is us. Each one of us brings a unique talent and perspective to our business and that is really what is making us successful. Without that diversity and willingness to do whatever it takes to succeed, we'd probably still put out some interesting stuff, but I don't think it would be anywhere near as compelling as what we are presently doing (or will continue to do).

SP!: YOUR BOOKS ARE PRINTED IN FULL COLOR, 24 PAGES LONG, AND REASONABLY PRICED. I SEE THEY WERE PRINTED IN CHINA. WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES OF PRINTING YOUR CONTENT OVERSEAS?

MCF: It takes a bit longer and a lot more planning, but to get the quality we want at the price we need, it is well worth it. We also have to buy in bulk, which keeps our costs down, but brings up the question of where to store so many books.

We work with Print Ninja, who is based in Chicago, but prints in China. I could not be happier with the level of service they provide and the quality of the product. I frequently recommend them to other folks looking for a printer.

SP!: BESIDES CONVENTIONS, WHERE ELSE CAN SOMEONE FIND YOUR PRINT TITLES?

MCF: Our products can be found on comiXology, in select stores, like Alternate Universe in Milford, CT and Quimby's in Chicago, on our website's store page, and several other online mediums. A quick Google search will probably turn up a few I missed.

SP!: WHERE CAN WE FIND WAYWARD RAVEN ON THE WEB?

MCF: https://www.facebook.com/waywardravenmedia

https://twitter.com/waywardraven

http://waywardraven.com/

http://damnheroes.com/

@WaywardRaven

@PantherPitt

@JLAJones

@ASapountzis

We'd be happy to offer 15% off to any of your readers. Just use the code "FALLON" to claim your discount at http://waywardraven.storenvy.com/

TITLES FROM WAYWARD RAVEN

Horsemen:

The price of freedom is eternal vigilance, but it helps to have extra-terrestrials on your side.

The Horsemen are a group of guardians saddled upon cybernetic steeds that gallop across the stars and protect the multiverse from a totalitarian force that wishes to extinguish free will throughout all space and time. Evil has plots within plots, but the Horsemen will ride, even when internal struggles arise.

The Ascendant:

In an epic battle, Cail struggles against the demon juggernaut Halstein in the streets of Rome. When the skirmish is interrupted, Cail realizes that he will need assistance to take his opponent down. For that, he turns to the infamous Dr. Faustus, who takes him on a journey that leads Cail through many darkened corners of the Eternal City, before he forces a final confrontation with his adversary.

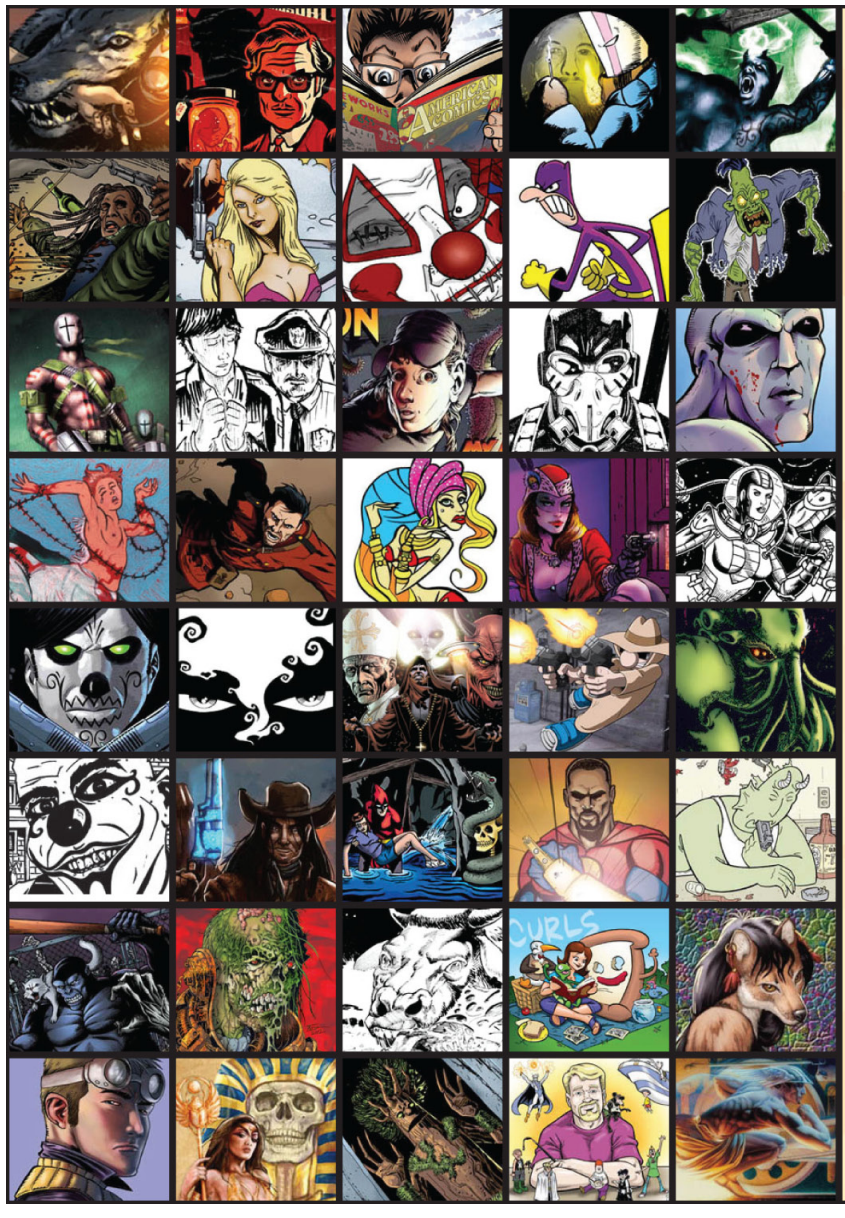
The Ascendant is a tale of an escaped Duke of Hell who begins to feel remorse for his millennia of debauchery and cruelty. That guilt causes him to masquerade as a human and go on a crusade against the other escaped creatures that inhabit the earth, corrupting and harming its citizens. Cail, the Doge of the Darkened Reaches, knows there is nothing but Earth and Hell, so his struggles are aimed at making the earth a better place, even if but for a short time.

Signed C:

In the big city, young women fall prey to foul plots every day, but few have a sorceress watching out for them. When a model disappears, her talent agent searches the known realms and, in the process, uncovers a plot that could undo the very order of the cosmos. Even magic might not be enough to prevail over her ancient foes. C: The Missing follows Ceecee as she tracks down her missing client through myth, magic and mayhem.

Damn Heroes:

When a young man goes five miles over the speed limit through Hero City, he suddenly finds himself sentenced to five years of community service in a city full of overly-zealous and wacky superheroes. His parole officer is the city's top hero and his only friend (and landlord) is the city's greatest supervillian. Let the zany adventures begin! New strip free every Wednesday at DamnHeroes.com.



We've created a monster:

A HUGE WEBSITE DEVOTED TO INDIE COMIC CREATORS.

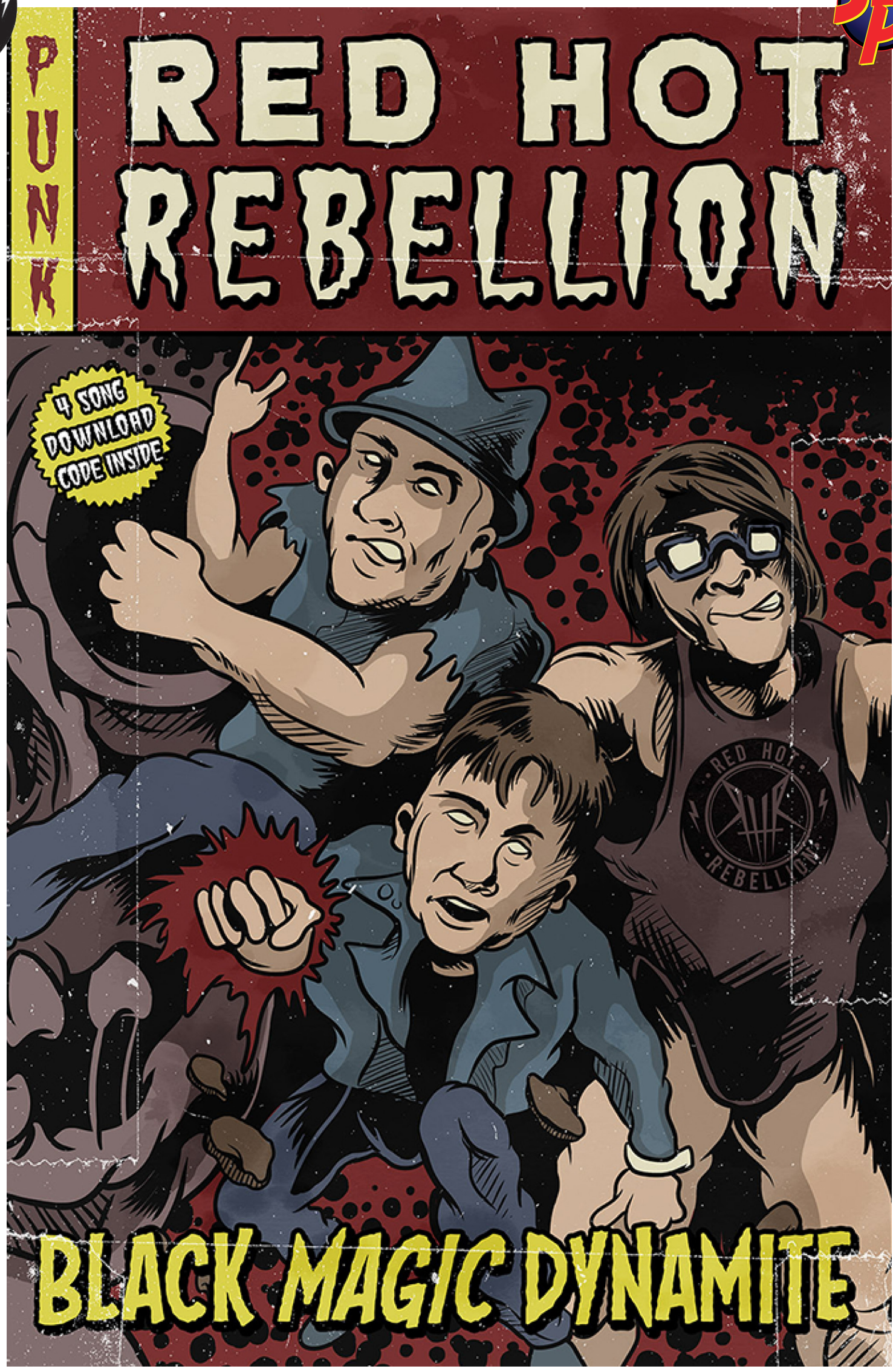
It's a strange portal to worlds uncanny and unknown. A vast gateway to astonishing and uncommon words and pictures.

And it's amazingly easy to use. See artist/writer. Click. Visit. Return. **Hours of free fun.**

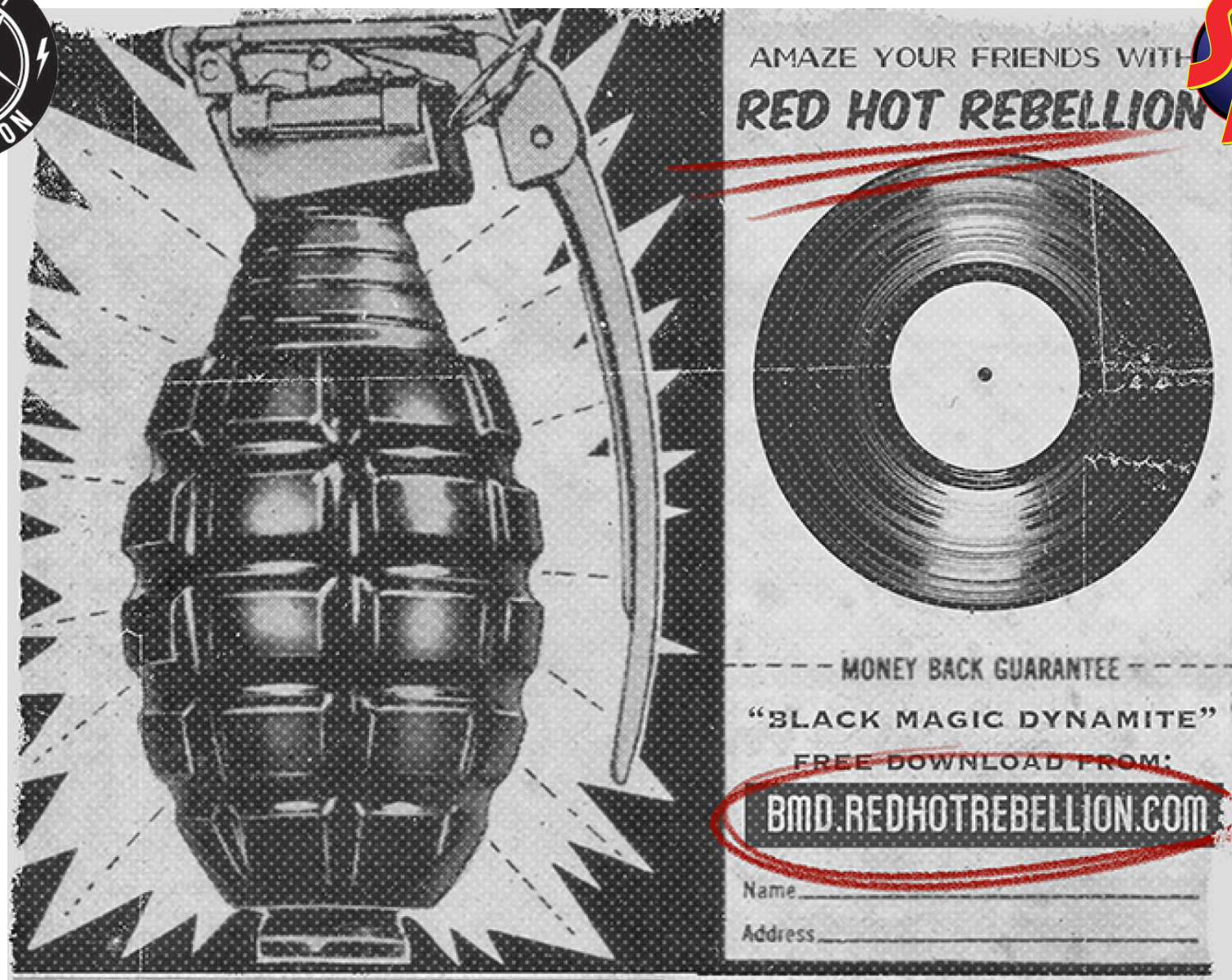
Just don't be sucked in to the detriment of your livelihood. Remember to eat. And pee.

Because we started out with the best intentions. But this thing is growing.

INDIE COMICS MAGAZINE.COM



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Cresent City Magick
Michael L. Peters



By Louise Cochran-Mason

Self-taught artist Michael L. Peters has been a professional comic book artist, and illustrator, since 1996. His works include Negative Burn (Desperado), Heavy Metal Magazine, REH: Two-gun Raconteur, Unbound (Image), Legends of Camelot (Caliber) and illustrations for the Robert E. Howard Museum, of Cross Plains, Texas.

He is now self-publishing a series of graphic novels called CRESCENT CITY MAGICK.

SP!: COULD YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT CRESCENT CITY MAGICK?

MLP: As my promo blurbs say, "'CRESCENT CITY MAGICK: Welcome to New Orleans' is an urban fantasy graphic novel. Clayton Woods, newly arrived to New Orleans and on the run from forces he doesn't understand, is aided by Julia, a red-haired, self-described witch, who is convinced Clayton has the makings of a hero. Clayton thinks Julia is crazy. With witches, aliens, street musicians, a black cat, zombies... what's not to like?"

I had the rough idea for this sort of street level urban fantasy and these characters for a long time, but the story began to gel after I spent five months living in New Orleans, working in my step-brothers' comic book store and getting to know the area. Aside from the summer heat, I loved the area and knew I had to use that experience somewhere—it was too good an experience not to. I hope to visit New Orleans again, someday.

I actually wrote and drew an earlier version of Crescent City Magick, under another title—there may be some preview mini-comics of that early version still floating around out there... I plan to talk about this early "draft" in Vol. 2's back-matter. I can't go into it, here—parts could be a spoiler for Vol. 2's story. I got pretty far with it. I learned a lot since then about pacing and structure that I'm now applying to Crescent City Magick.



CRESCENT CITY MAGICK Vol. 1 "Welcome to New Orleans" is the first volume in what I hope will be a fairly long series of graphic novels. I'm working on the second volume and have mapped out a story-line for at least two more volumes. It does have an end which I'm working toward, though it may be possible to keep going past that point—we'll see.



SP!: IS CRESCENT CITY MAGICK THE FIRST WORK YOU'RE WRITTEN, AS WELL AS DONE THE ART FOR?

MLP: No. I'd written and drawn (and sometimes painted) short stories for Heavy Metal magazine and Negative Burn (both, for readers unfamiliar with them, are comics anthologies).

SP!: WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO SELF-PUBLISH CRESCENT CITY MAGICK?

MLP: Self-publishing CRESCENT CITY MAGICK was out of frustration and a need to get the story out there. I had offers from some publishers, but not publishers who would support the book in any way—they had basically said, "We'll publish, but you aren't apt to see a dime". Some said it wasn't commercial enough... and some very indy publishers said it was too commercial. Not mainstream enough for the mainstream and too mainstream for the proudly edgy and indy.

If I hadn't made CRESCENT CITY MAGICK, I'd be first in line to buy it—I made the kind of book I want to read and motives like that and self-publishing tend to go together.

SP!: HOW DO YOU FIND SELF PUBLISHING, AS OPPOSED TO WORKING FOR A PUBLISHER?

MLP: It depends on the publisher. A big difference is, I own CRESCENT CITY MAGICK. Projects with a publisher and a page rate, where I still own the work were more profitable, but those were limited to short works. CRESCENT CITY MAGICK needed to be long form and no publisher who could promise any pay was willing to commit to that.

SP!: HOW ARE YOU DISTRIBUTING CRESCENT CITY MAGICK? IT'S ON AMAZON, BUT THERE IS ALSO MENTION OF "DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION OPPORTUNITIES THAT WILL DEBUT SOON".

MLP: The print version is on Amazon and can also be ordered through some other book sites (it's available from the Barnes & Noble site, last I checked). I haven't put it through Diamond, yet. I'm still learning print distribution and it is a steep learning curve for me. Digital is a whole other area and learning curve, but in a way simpler and more direct. It's currently available as four separate "issues" (the graphic novel's chapters) for Kindle, and by sometime in September 2014 (maybe by the time

this interview is posted), the whole graphic novel, plus some extra content (expanded back-matter), should be available from Madefire and wherever they sell comics online (iTunes, I think). I'm also waiting to hear back from Comixology—fingers crossed—Comixology is very picky about formatting; a pixel out of place and you go back to the end of a very long line.

I like print best, myself.

SP!: YOU'RE "A PORTRAIT ARTIST FOR FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY OF BIG RAPIDS, MICHIGAN". WHAT DOES THAT ENTAIL?

MLP: Several years ago, Ferris hired me to draw large pen-and-ink drawings of all of Ferris State University's former presidents—there's a wall near the president's office at the university that is covered with, I think, around 16 (maybe more) of these portraits, including that of the current FSU president. Ferris has also had me draw smaller portraits of their honorary doctorate recipients, which they give the recipient, along with the degree. And I've done a painting of former Michigan governor G. Mennen Williams for FSU's Williams Auditorium. I'm currently working on something a little different for Ferris—drawing a sort of landscape of three of their buildings.

SP!: CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR UPCOMING CONVENTION APPEARANCES?

MLP: My only scheduled convention appearance was at GrandCon, in Grand Rapids Michigan, September 19th–21st, 2014. I'll also be at a store, "The Comic Book E.R", in Cadillac, Michigan on October 25th— a sort of pre-Halloween event. I expect, as most years, to set up at the Motor City Comic Con, next May. Convention hosts are welcome to contact me through the contact info on my website (mlpeters.com).

SP!: THE COMICS INDUSTRY HAS CHANGED A LOT SINCE YOU STARTED OUT. DO YOU THINK IT IS HARDER TO MAKE A LIVING OUT OF COMICS NOW, OR EASIER (OR THE SAME)?

MLP: I don't know. I sort of missed the easier times, if they really were easier—first breaking in right as everything went into free-fall, in the mid-to-late (or "too late") '90s. There are more options now, but it's hard to judge which options are good. A lot has to do more with the overall economy. If people can barely afford



food, they won't buy comics, especially with so much free distraction online.

SP!: DO YOU THINK THE INTERNET HAS MADE IT EASIER FOR PEOPLE TO SELF PUBLISH, AND DISTRIBUTE THEIR SELF PUBLISHED WORK?

MLP: Absolutely, but it also made it harder to get noticed—the whole "signal to noise" issue.

SP!: WHAT EFFECT HAS ADVANCING TECHNOLOGY HAD ON THE INDUSTRY?

MLP: Publishing is all easier and cheaper. Social media provides ways to reach people. Some artists have taken to drawing with tablets and stylus... but I'm not one of them (I still dip my pen in an ink bottle), though I have done some colouring with PhotoShop and found my traditional painting techniques transferred easily, which is cool.

SP!: DO YOU THINK THE NUMBER OF SELF PUBLISHED COMICS, PRINT-ON-DEMAND COMICS, DIGITAL COMICS AND WEB COMICS MAKES IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR INDIVIDUAL CREATORS TO PROMOTE AND MARKET THEIR WORK?

MLP: I suppose so - - it's easy to slip through the cracks... you hope quality and dedication wins out, but you never know... but it's not like self-publishing comics has ever been easy and it used to be so much more expensive. It's a trade-off.

SP!: HOW IMPORTANT TO DO THINK IT IS FOR CREATORS TO HAVE THEIR WORK IN BRICKS-AND-MORTAR COMIC BOOK SHOPS AS WELL AS ONLINE?

MLP: Both are important. I've concentrated on online sales, because up-front expense is so much lower and the percentage you get back, higher. You have to sell a lot of books to make any profit with bricks and mortar, since everyone gets a cut, with the publisher/creator being last in that chain. It's daunting... but at the same time, overcoming fears almost always pays off.

SP!: DID YOU MARKET YOUR WORK?

MLP: Depends on what you mean. I promote the hell out of CRESCENT CITY MAGICK online, but don't have the budget for running ads. I do the best I can and try to get better at it. I'm learning promotion

by doing... while finding time to keep on creating, as well as doing non-comics drawing jobs that keep the lights on. It's a tough balance.

SP!: YOU DO ILLUSTRATIONS AND DESIGN WORK AS WELL AS SEQUENTIAL ART. ARE YOU PLANNING ON PUBLISHING THOSE PIECES AS ART BOOKS?

MLP: I do have an art book planned, mostly gathering all my fantasy art prints and private commissions, along with sketchbook material and some of my anthology comics work (to which I own the rights). I have a couple of other book projects in mind, but they're not ready to be talked about. I also hope to do more illustration work and private commissions.

SP!: WHAT FUTURE PROJECTS HAVE YOU GOT IN THE WORKS?

MLP: Right now, as I said earlier, I'm working on a second CRESCENT CITY MAGICK graphic novel and an art book. I have some ideas for other projects, but it's too soon to talk about any of that. I'm also open to working on projects that aren't solely mine... a little collaboration sounds attractive sometimes, though I plan to always have a project or two of my own going.

SP!: WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES?

MLP: Almost everything from reading books, watching movies, studying art, folklore and mythology... it all feeds into my work, so not, strictly speaking, "hobbies". I like to exercise, to lift weights, as a way to compensate for so many hours spent at the drawing board—does that count?

Weblinks:

http://mlpeters.com

http://amzn.com/B00FUWU86O

http://mybook.to/CCM-v1

http://mlpeters.com/CCM-Book01.pdf

http://www.grand-con.com/content/michael-l-peters

http://www.motorcitycomiccon.com/comiccon-events/michael-peters/



Building a Respectable Hell
Kenton Daniels



By Douglas Owen

Kenton Daniels has survived the odds. After growing up around the obsessive German women in his family, he did what anyone would do; he joined the US Army and served his country for three years.

A graduate of Ohio State and Kent State, he studied Anthropology, as well as Library and Information Science. In between his studies, he served in the Peach Corps.

When we say Kenton gives of himself, it is apparent from his record. In 2009 he started working with various independent publishers and, in 2012, teamed up with Shannon Ritchie to release his first graphic novel, Blood for Stone, through Alterna.

Kenton is obsessed with Annie Oakley, and with Shannon, he has thrown her down the rabbit hole and crafted a western web comic based on the American icon. He and Shannon now share their demented visions with an unsuspecting public through their web portal, Alterna Comics.

So without ado, let us introduce you to Kenton Daniels.

SP!: YOU GREW UP AROUND GERMAN WOMEN. IS YOUR FAMILY GERMAN?

KD: My mother is from Germany. My parents met while my father was serving in the US Army West Berlin garrison. As a little one, I spent many summers in Berlin with her, my aunt, and my grandmother. My grandmother had an apartment in Spandau, one of the oldest sections of Berlin. So, I spent a lot of my time literally playing in old castles. Later on, I think that played a big role in my interests in both fantasy and archaeology.

SP!: SO YOU WERE AN EXPLORER FROM A YOUNG AGE. DOES ANYTHING REALLY STICK OUT FROM THE TIME YOU SPENT WANDERING THROUGH THE RUINS?

KD: When I learned about castle murder holes. That was a sobering experience for a child.

SP!: WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO SERVE YOUR COUNTRY?



Artist Shannon Ritchie

KD: Two things: my dad and bad grades. I was always fascinated with my dad's old army photos and his medals. Then, there were those high school grades. I was a serious layabout and troublemaker as a teen. The miracle of those years! It was fun, but the end of the road left me barely graduating and with few prospects. The army recruiter showed me another path—defend Western civilization against the Red horde.

SP!: DO YOU USE ANY OF YOUR EXPERIENCES FROM THE ARMY IN YOUR WORK? IF SO, PLEASE GIVE US AN EXAMPLE.

KD: Most of my notable Army experiences had to do with excursions to local bars and bizarre late-night cab rides. I think a few of my characters from Blood for Stone and A Respectable Hell are loosely influenced by some of the real-life characters I met during my army time, especially some of the drill sergeants at Fort Dix. I think some of the countryside I saw during my time in Germany influenced the setting for Blood for Stone.

SP!: THE PEACE CORPS SOUNDS SO LEFT FIELD FROM THE ARMY; WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO JOIN THEM?

KD: After I graduated from OSU with an anthropology degree, it seemed like a natural fit... at first. I only lasted a couple months in the Peace Corps. For some reason, I just wasn't fitting into the

volunteer program. I actually loved hanging out with my host family, doing things with them. I spent most of my time chilling at their hacienda. In the end, I didn't see why I was being paid to do something locals could do with the proper training. I mean, I was an anthropology graduate. What did I know about water sanitation that you couldn't teach somebody else to do?

SP!: I UNDERSTAND. BUT STILL, IT MUST HAVE BEEN AN EYE-OPENER TO SEE HOW OTHERS AROUND THE WORLD LIVE. DO YOU USE ANY OF THAT IN YOUR WORK?

KD: I think so, definitely. The Peace Corps and anthropology, philosophically, are actually a great match. I'm always fascinated with straddling worlds, the process of having one foot in and one out. It's a great observational perspective. It's not so easy to detach one's self sometimes, but it's a valuable way to learn. The character of Ellie Hopkins in A Respectable Hell is a sort of cultural filter. She, herself, represents a collision between two worlds, being half European and half Native American. She demonstrates how differently people from unique cultural backgrounds... even the best of friends.... can see the same events.

SP!: TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR STUDIES. WHY DID YOU PICK ANTHROPOLOGY AND LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES?

KD: The big castles and ancient walls of old Berlin impacted my desire to study anthropology and archaeology. But so did Indiana Jones. When that movie came out, it blew my mind wide open. That and Star Wars. But Star Wars didn't make me want to explore ruins. Star Wars made me want to wear a black cape and marry a princess. Basically, the reason I got into library studies was a friend I had who worked in a small college library. She sold me on how interesting the work really is.

SP!: WELL, DID YOU? MARRY A PRINCESS, THAT IS, OR ARE YOU STILL FLYING AROUND WITH THE BLACK CAPE?

KD: I did marry a princess. We're not "legally" married, but we're together and it's staying that way. We both wear black capes now. It's all about teamwork.

SP!: WHAT TITLES HAVE YOU WORKED ON IN THE PAST AND WHAT WERE YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS?





KD: I worked on the scripts for a couple of Bluewater Projects. First, there was Tony and Cleo. I worked on that with Darren Davis, Ken Cottingham, and Dafu Yu. I learned A LOT about pacing with that project. Darren was very patient with us. It was a great opportunity. I also did a little work on some 10th Muse and Legend of Isis books.

SP!: THOSE ARE GREAT OPPORTUNITIES. WHAT OTHER PROJECTS DID YOU WORK ON BEFORE STRIKING OUT ON YOUR OWN?

KD: That was really about it. I wrote a few scripts for other publishers that never saw the light of day.

SP!: What made you want to partner up with Shannon Ritchie?

KD: I was desperate to find an artist to work on Blood for Stone and didn't know how to find one. Then, one day, somebody invented the internet. I ran across this site called, Comic Art Commissions and literally started browsing through all the listings. That's when I saw some of Shannon's samples. They were rich pieces, looked almost like woodcuts. We made a love connection.



SP!: IS SHANNON YOUR GO-TO ARTIST?

KD: Most definitely. Shannon and I have developed a great chemistry when it comes to storytelling. We know how to communicate, and that's not an easy thing to pull off sometimes.

SP!: BLOOD FOR STONE IS A HECK OF A TITLE FOR A GRAPHIC NOVEL. HOW DID YOU COME UP WITH THAT?

KD: When I first started the script, there weren't caves of any sort. Then, it became all about caves. Looking at it now, it sort of reminds me of a Roman version of the movie, The Descent. The blood part of it really has to do with the nature of soldiers (anybody really) dedicating themselves to others. And of course, when you talk about Roman soldiers, the notion of honor has to be a part of the discussion as well.

SP!: DO A LOT OF THE STORIES REVOLVE AROUND HONOR?

KD: I'd say honor... and responsibility. And how people respond to conflict when the chips are down.

SP!: HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR STYLE OF ARTWORK?

KD: Shannon's art is rich. It vibrates with intensity. You find yourself staring at it, exploring the lines. He's a tattoo artist by trade and training, and this shows through in what he does in comics. In terms of writing, I can't seem to not be about slow pacing and character development. In a way, there's almost a friendly tension between my slow storytelling and Shannon's focused heavy line work. The pace of my stories, at times, can neglect climatic action scenes. I always try to maintain an awareness of that. So, when it's time for things to come to a boil, they tend to boil over.

SP!: ARE YOU SAYING YOUR ACTION SCENES ARE BEYOND COMPARE? THAT IS, BETWEEN YOUR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AND SHANNON'S ARTWORK?

KD: I just believe action sequences are so much more powerful when the characters have some depth and the reader has developed some sort of attachment. Visually, I'd say our scenes can be out of control sometimes. But I like to see little pauses too, panels that cut away to some random piece of the action, like a shoe on the ground, a spent shell casing, a sweaty forehead.

SP!: SO, YOU THREW ANNIE OAKLEY DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE. DID YOU AT LEAST LET HER TAKE HER RIFLE, OR DID YOU JUST

SEND FRANK WITH HER?

KD: Frank will definitely come later. I'm scared to bring him in too early, partially because I'm afraid it won't do justice to the real Annie and Frank. Their real-life relationship was almost like a fairy tale. Reading about them together almost brings a tear to my eye every time. They loved each other so deeply. My story is pretty much a dark fantasy rooted more in the bleaker aspects of Annie's real-life childhood. Now THAT reads more like Dickens.

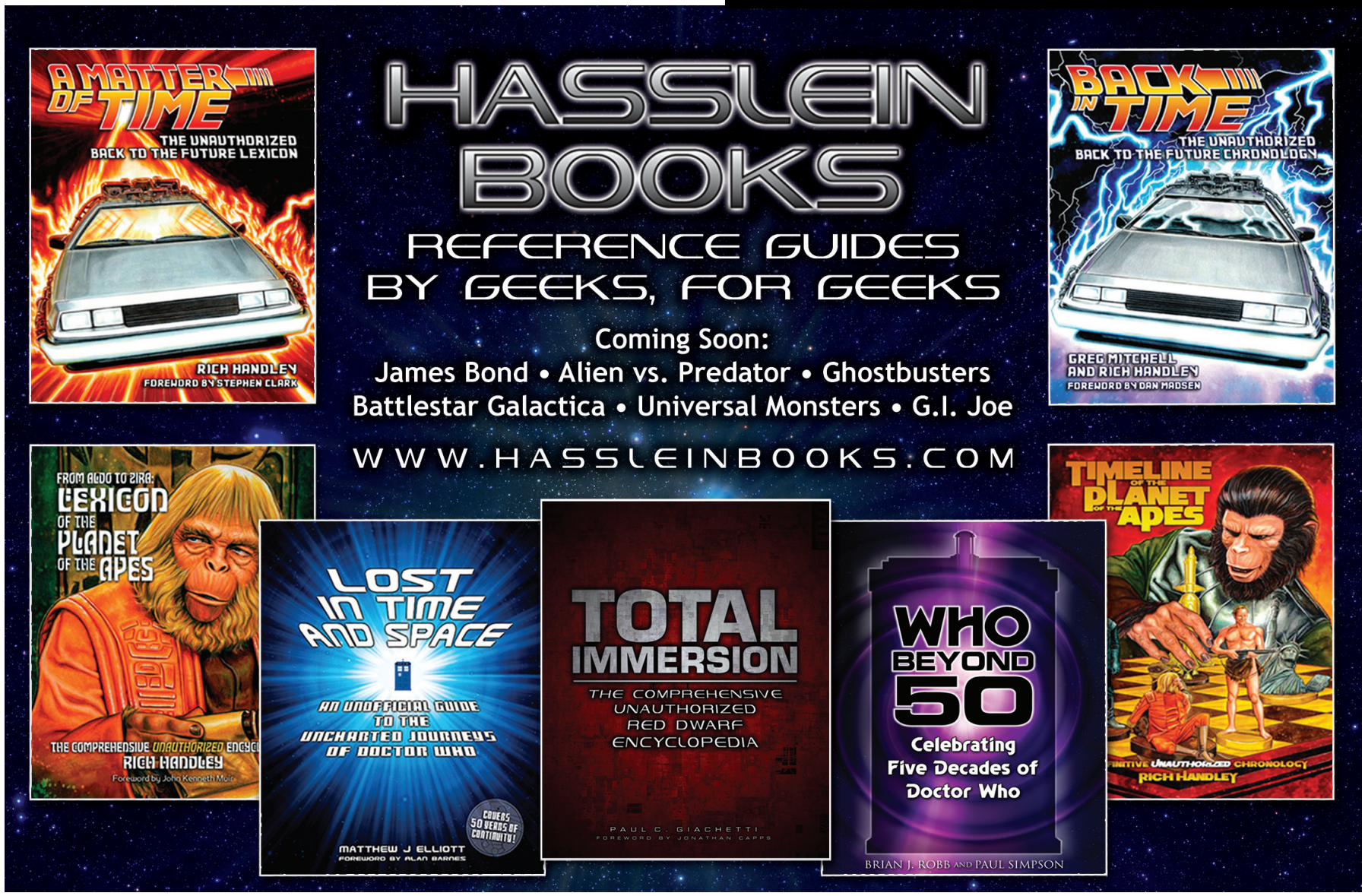
SP!: TELL US ABOUT YOUR CURRENT PROJECT.

KD: A Respectable Hell is a western, I suppose, but only because there's a character named Annie Oakley. It's really a supernatural horror tale about two friends who cross over into a dark reality (or unreality) where forces, natural and otherwise, challenge their lives, as well as their sanity. It's a story about being lost and not being sure if you'll ever be found again. It's a struggle for control of one's own destiny. I think we all deal with that "dark reality", every day, on some level.

SP!: WHAT PLANS DO YOU HAVE FOR THE FUTURE?

KD: I want to keep A Respectable Hell going of course. But there are always other projects. Always.





Poetry is communication
Neville Hiatt



By Mark Turner

Giving voice to the nuances of the human experience is an art form that is mastered by few, but a language that speaks to all of mankind. One aspect of this translation takes the shape of poetry, a dialect that author Neville Hiatt has come to share with the world over the course of a number of published works. Taking time away from his pursuits, Mr. Hiatt took the time to share his background, work and inspirations.

Neville Hiatt was born in a small country town in the south eastern corner of Australia. After having speech therapy as a child, he went on to spend a decade working in radio which took him around the globe. Growing up, he spent as much time in worlds created by other authors as the one he had been born into. After a life-changing accident, he has used his imagination to not only continue living in this world, but share a bit of joy with others along the way.

The creative journey over the last few years has led to a line of poetry books and CDs under the Bard from Ballarat banner. This led to a range of limited edition photographs being offered under the Enchanting Times Photography banner. The latest endeavour, undertaken as a way of battling the chronic pain, anxiety, and depression, has been the collection of short stories, Some Shorter than Others.

SP!: COULD YOU SHARE WITH READERS HOW YOU CAME TO WRITE POETRY? WAS IT A CULMINATION OF LIFE EVENTS, OR HAVE YOU ALWAYS HAD A LOVE OF THE MEDIUM?

NH: I've loved writing poetry for as long as I can remember. I only started sharing this love publicly after a life-changing accident in 2008 ended my working life.

SP!: TONALLY, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR WORK? WHAT FORMS OF POETRY DO YOU FIND YOURSELF PRACTICING THE MOST?

NH: Poems based on love, usually of the romantic nature, seems to be my default setting. I'm a romantic at heart. However, the more I'm writing, the more I find I'm writing more social conscience pieces and more poems that don't rhyme.

SP!: DO YOU WORK IN ANY FORMATS OTHER THAN POETRY? IF SO, WHAT TYPES?

NH: As much as I love the poetic form, I have just released my first collection of short stories. I've wanted to share stories longer than a poem for some time now, and I'm so happy to have finally realised this dream.

SP!: COULD YOU SHARE A BIT ABOUT YOUR FIRST BODY OF WORK, THE BARD FROM BALLARAT VOLUMES 1 AND 2? WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO CREATE THIS BODY OF WORK, AND HOW HAS THE MANNER IN WHICH IT HAS BEEN RECEIVED BY THE PUBLIC INSPIRED YOU TO CONTINUE?

NH: The Bard from Ballarat Volume 1 came about as a project suggested by my psychologist as a way of battling the anxiety and depression I was experiencing as a result of being medically retired by the age of 30. The original version met with some early encouraging feedback, so Volume 2 was collated, and both Volumes 1 and 2 were printed, and I am still really proud of the quality of the finished product.

SP!: DO YOU HAVE ANY INFLUENCES THAT INSPIRE YOUR WRITING STYLE?

NH: Everything in life inspires me, from my own life to others lives I interact with; from music to movies. Country music, in particular, has been a lifelong influence. Travel really gets my creative juices flowing.

SP!: YOU OFTEN PAIR PHOTOGRAPHY WITH YOUR WORK AS WELL, CORRECT? DO YOU DRAW THE INSPIRATION FOR YOUR WORDS FROM THE PHOTOS, OR THE INSPIRATION FOR THE PHOTOS FROM YOUR WORDS?

NH: I quite often get asked when doing public readings, "Which comes first, the photos or the poems?" and it changes from poem to poem.



In "To the Lady of the Lake," for example, I took the photo a week before writing the poem and, until that point, they were unrelated. On thinking of a title for the poem, I thought of that photo, and now they are forever intertwined. "Walking Tall" is an example of knowing the photo I wanted to go with it, but it took me months to find the perfect location.

SP!: IN TERMS OF YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY, DO YOU WORK DIGITALLY OR WITH A TRADITIONAL SLR FILM CAMERA? WHAT TYPE OF IMAGERY DO YOU ENJOY PHOTOGRAPHING THE MOST?

NH: If I had my own darkroom, I'd shoot film, but I don't. I use digital 100 percent of the time; it's so much cheaper to play around while taking the shots, and there's the versatility of being able to work on them before printing and then only printing the ones I want. I love photography. I love nature shots, most specifically, sunrises and sunsets; I love playing around in that magic light hour.

SP!: OF YOUR CURRENT BODY OF WORKS, WHICH ONE WOULD YOU SAY MEANS THE MOST TO YOU? WHY?

NH: It's like picking a favourite child to choose the piece that means the most to me. One that has meant a lot to me is "To the son I never knew," as the feedback I've had from others has been the most real. It was also recently featured by a support blog.

SP!: IN TERMS OF YOUR PROCESS, HOW OFTEN DO YOU FIND YOURSELF



WRITING? DO YOU HAVE A SET ROUTINE WITH REGARD TO YOUR DISCIPLINE? ANY TOOLS THAT YOU FIND MAKE THE PROCESS OF WRITING EASIER FOR YOU? WHICH PART OF THE PROCESS DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST?

NH: Writing, for me, is a very inspired process. If my senses aren't being stimulated in some form, the ink stays dry. Some poems have been written in public on backs of envelopes with stubs of pencils, some have been keyed in one character at time on a phone, and some have been written at the dining room table while wearing a black and red jester's hat. The moment I like the most is the first time I share a new work with someone.

SP!: WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO THOSE WHO HAVE EVER CONSIDERED COMPOSING POETRY?

NH: Do it. Write, share, read, write some more, connect with other poets, and keep writing.

SP!: WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON? WHERE CAN READERS FIND YOU AND YOUR WORK?

NH: Currently working on converting Some Shorter than Others into an audio book. My works can be found at: http://someshorterthanothers.pubslush.com

https://www.facebook.com/thebardfromballarat my poetry page https://www.facebook.com/someshorterthanothers my short stories page

https://www.facebook.com/EnchantingTimesPhotography my photography page

http://nevillehiatt.com new website, new webstore, new blog and new competitions

SP!: WHAT DO YOU HAVE PLANNED FOR THE NEAR FUTURE, IN TERMS OF YOUR WORK?

NH: I'm still writing the occasional poem, but the main focus at the moment is on getting the audio book completed in time for Christmas and encouraging others to write by way of the 100-word story competition being run in conjunction with the launch of Some Shorter than Others. I'm also planning a new photographic exhibition revolving around my changed life since the accident.







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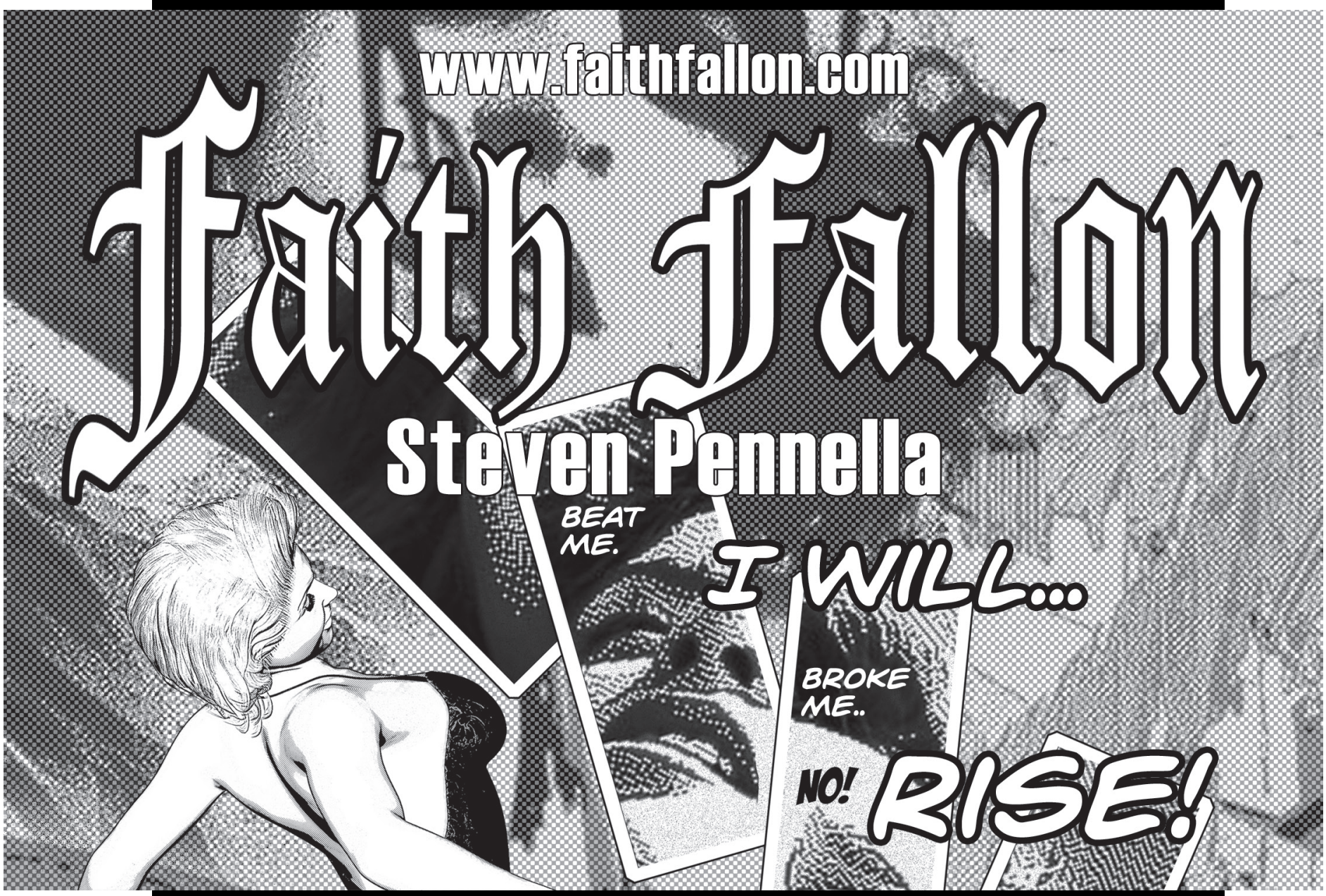
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