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Bad comics news again? I'm afraid so. Christian looks into CB Cebulski's comics writing alter ego and Steve rounds up more news of harassment and abuse. But we also chat with veteran inker Mark Morales and look at the evolving depiction of mixed-race people in comics. Welcome to the last issue of The MNT of 2017!

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# CB Cebulski's Two Year Masquerade as a Japanese Man

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Christian Hoffer

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Akira Yoshida himself.

CB Cebulski's reign as Marvel's editor-in-chief began with the bizarre revelation that he had posed as the Japanese mangaka "Akira Yoshida" for a two year period. It appears that Cebulski created Yoshida (which is a combination of the popular manga Akira and the last name of the X-Men character Sunfire) as an alias to start his writing career, but quickly transitioned into a somewhat well-reviewed Marvel creator. Cebulski, as Yoshida, wrote several Marvel comics in 2004 and 2005 while simultaneously working for Marvel as an associate editor. Cebulski was also interviewed several times as Yoshida and even created an elaborate backstory as to why the mangaka had transitioned to writing Western

comics.

Yoshida's comics largely focused on "gaijin" in Japan and his work in hindsight had a theme of foreigners proving they belonged within tradition Japanese society. While Cebulski was living in New York during the time he posed as Yoshida, he previously had spent time in Japan and speaks fluent Japanese. In fact, Cebulski's first work in the comics industry was translating manga into English for CPM Manga in the late 1990s.

However, Yoshida's comics also contained several almost laughably bad factual errors about Japan, including a metaphor about the five islands of Japan being like the five fingers of a hand...when in fact there are only four islands in Japan.

Yoshida disappeared from the comics industry in 2006, shortly before Cebulski stepped down from his associate editor role at Marvel. It's unclear as to why Cebulski briefly left Marvel in 2006 or if it were in anyway related to a higher up finding out about Yoshida's true identity. A few months later, Cebulski was re-hired by Marvel under a contract that allowed him to openly write comics under his own name.

He transitioned into a more managerial role and eventually became Marvel's vice president of international brand management, working out of Shanghai. Cebulski's second stint at Marvel also saw him recruit talent for the company, including artists from various parts of Asia and Asian-Americans.

While there were rumors that Yoshida was actually a pseudonym for years, the story picked up steam in July 2017 when ex-Marvel assistant editor Gregg Schiegel published a podcast called "The Names Have Been Changed" that strongly implied that CB Cebulski was actually Yoshida and that several other Marvel employees were aware of the deception.

And, to be clear, this was Cebulski deceiving both Marvel and the public about his identity. At the time, Marvel had a policy that said that editors couldn't earn extra income by writing comics at a freelance rate for the company. By lying about his identity Cebulski purposefully circumnavigated this policy, although it's unclear how Yoshida was paid by Marvel.

Shortly after Marvel announced Cebulski had been promoted as editor-in-chief, Image Comics brand manager David Brothers publicly tweeted about Cebulski posing as Yoshida. This led to Cebulski publicly admitting to the deception to Bleeding Cool the following day in an almost off-the-cuff manner.

Cebulski's statement to Bleeding Cool is as follows: "I stopped writing under the pseudonym Akira Yoshida after about a year. It wasn't transparent, but it taught me a lot about writing, communication and pressure. I was young and naïve and had a lot

to learn back then. But this is all old news that has been dealt with, and now as Marvel's new editor-in-chief, I'm turning a new page and am excited to start sharing all my Marvel experiences with up and coming talent around the globe."

As a side note, Cebulski (according to his autobiographical comic *Wonderlost*, which is an entirely different can of worms that needs opening) graduated high school in 1989, so he was between the ages of 32 and 34, which can hardly be considered "young" by any professional metric, when he assumed his Yoshida alias.



One of Akira's many white ninja comics.

According to Bleeding Cool, Cebulski's double life as Yoshida wasn't widely known by at least some Marvel higher-ups until he was being vetted as a candidate as editor-in-chief. Per Rich Johnston's account, Cebulski was punished internally for the deception but was still promoted.

Honestly, the whole story is...bizarre on multiple levels. There's the uncomfortable racism surrounding Cebulski's deception, particularly as "Yoshida" was hired to provide an authentic Japanese voice to Marvel's comics. In fact, Yoshida was internally seen as an asset for Marvel, as he had made a successful transition to American comics in a way that other Japanese mangaka had not. The story that Cebulski created for Yoshida's backstory is also filled with some uncomfortable Japanese stereotypes, some that actual people of Japanese descent found offensive.

As a sidenote, there's another weird and racist anecdote in that several then editors at Marvel, including Mike Marts, claimed to have met Yoshida in person. In fact, Marts actually met and even took out to lunch a Japanese translator who was in the office for an unrelated visit. That's a bad look - even if Marts knew at the time that the translator wasn't Yoshida and simply misremembered later.

There's also another troubling aspect to this story, namely that Schiegel implied that Cebulski accepted pitches from freelance

writers and then repurposed them as pitches from Yoshida. Geek.com also published a similar allegation, but from an anonymous source. I can't comment on the veracity of those claims, but that's going to be an uncomfortable rumor that will probably follow Cebulski's time in charge of Marvel during his tenure.

As a Disney stockholder, I'm also disturbed about professional aspects of the Cebulski/Yoshida revelations. Marvel knowingly promoted someone who actively misled and deceived his higher-ups in the past, which brings up some heavy ethical and legal concerns. Even if Cebulski didn't actively defraud Marvel (meaning that his editors and accounting at the time knew that Yoshida wasn't real - which is a real possibility), you can't help but question Marvel's hiring process following these allegations.

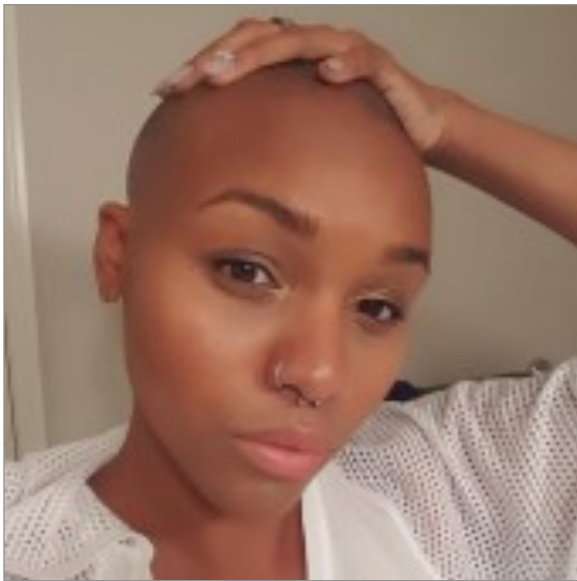
Some industry professionals have compared Cebulski's deception as using a simply pseudonym, something that's not uncommon in comics. However, creating an alias with an elaborate backstory is a bit different than simply using a more generic name, especially when that alias and background is of a different race and cultural background as your own. It's one thing to write under a fake name...it's another to pass off cultural experiences as your own.

And that's why Cebulski's Yoshida alias isn't the same as a white creator like Brian Bendis writing the Black/Hispanic character Miles Morales, an example Sana Amanat gave when defending Cebulski's actions. To the best of my knowledge, Bendis didn't pitch Miles Morales as being informed by his background as a Black/Hispanic man.

Honestly, this might be the most bizarre story I've ever covered as a comics journalist. Cebulski is a well-regarded member of the comics industry and has brought in many creators from different ethnic backgrounds to Marvel, but it's impossible to watch this unfold and see him in the same light. Even if Cebulski has made professional restitution at Marvel, his Yoshida alias was at best idiotic and insensitive and at worst wantonly racist and that's something that should color his reputation and standing in the comics community moving forward.

# How White Feminism Drove Me Out of the Valkyries

Jazmine Joyner



Jazmine Joyner co-owns Visionary Comics in Southern California. She writes for [Women Write About Comics](#), [Ms En Scene](#), and other fun sites. Follow her on twitter [@jazmine\\_joyner](#).

White feminism affects every aspect of my life on the daily basis as a Black femme/woman in America. But none so much as my experience with it within the comics industry. I own and operate Visionary Comics, a comic shop in California. I was the first black woman on the west coast to open a comics retail store. As a black woman in this industry, I have faced my share of harassment. I have been called SJW trash and racial slurs, I have had customers smear my character on the internet and spread lies about me in secret Facebook groups.

Comics isn't for the faint of heart if you are a

Black woman.

So when I heard about the Valkyries I was excited to have a network of women to commiserate with about the day to day chaos that is working within the direct market in an industry that is sexist as hell. Within a few months of opening my shop, I was invited by a friend of a friend to join them. The Valkyries are a group of women (mostly white, I later learned) who work in, own, or manage comic retail stores. They have a Facebook group, which I joined, where they discuss tips and event ideas, and share horror stories of customers from hell and dudebros mansplaining the

importance of Frank Miller's *Dark Knight* in excruciating detail (not that exactly but you catch my drift).

I instantly noticed a lot of the Valkyries were white women; few were Black women or women of color. My issues with the group started early: in fact, right when I started interacting with them. There would be a call out in the group for ideas on events to get more customers in the door. I would comment with some things my shop was doing, and I would get immediately bombarded with criticisms. It happened with every post I commented on. So I stopped commenting altogether. I would just watch from the sidelines. It wasn't until earlier this year that I decided to leave the group altogether.

The inciting incident was #makeminemilkshake. In June of 2017 Heather Antos, a Marvel Comics Editor (and a white woman), tweeted a photo of her and her female co-workers going out and getting milkshakes. Only for her innocuous post to receive hate and vicious DMs from Marvel fanboys accusing her of politicizing comic books, and being the reason for the decline of the quality of the stories being told by the publisher. Basically saying women editing books are the reason Marvel's stories are garbage.

An outpouring of support came from all over the industry on different social media platforms. Twitter user @Corimarie21 created the hashtag #makeminemilkshake in solidarity with Heather Antos. Women and creators in the comics industry posted pictures of themselves drinking milkshakes. The hashtag went viral and hundreds of women and men participated. Even Marvel and DC tweeted in support of the hashtag, affirming their support of women within the industry. I believe what happened to Antos was awful and no one deserves to be harassed for drinking a milkshake with their friends.

The problem with the resounding response to her harassment is Black women and women of color in comics get hassled and harassed on a daily basis. Yet no one makes a hashtag for them. No one fights for them when the comics dudebros go after their stories or their art. It's because of this lack of support of Black women and women of color in comics that I didn't want to participate in the hashtag. But the Valkyries were mobilizing their troops. They were posting picture after picture of themselves drinking milkshakes for Heather Antos, all while ignoring the valid

conversations about the WOC who felt that this protest was the embodiment of White Feminism.

I brought this up with one of the Valkyrie founders, the woman who recruited me. I told her how insensitive it was for them to blindly follow this hashtag without realizing that it erases the black women and women of color who get harassed in comics every day without a hashtag or a hoard of white women coming to their rescue. She seemed to understand, especially after I said that, as a black woman, The Valkyries didn't seem to be a safe place for my voice. I told her that I might leave the group. She admitted to me that the Valkyries admin team was completely white and the group was predominately white as well. I saved my decision for the next day. I wanted a night to think about it. The next day I decided to leave. That same admin had taken our conversation and my grievance with the group and turned it into an article published on a large comic website. She was praised for writing about the exact concerns I brought to her.

I asked to leave the group immediately after I read the piece. It felt like my experiences and concerns were used for her personal gain. And instead of encouraging or helping a woman of color have the opportunity speak about this issue she chose to do it herself. The comments after the piece were a mix of white women praising the author and telling each other how they needed to do better, with the irony of their dialogue taking place in a predominately white space seemingly lost on them. Most of the spaces I work in within the comics industry, whether it be retail or journalism, are predominantly white spaces. Navigating this world is like tripping through a minefield. After my experience with the Valkyries and #makeminemilkshake I have a hard time figuring out who's a true ally.

White feminism is something that probably won't be leaving comics anytime soon. Not unless we prioritize Black women and women of color into every facet of the comics industry.

# News Report

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Christian, Jon, Kirsten, Vernieda, and Steve

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A common adage states that if a hero lives long enough, they will become the villain. While a rather depressing perspective on human nature, manga fans felt it keenly when news broke that Tokyo Metropolitan Police had pressed charges of possession of child pornography against mangaka Nobuhiro Watsuki. Watsuki is the creator of the much-beloved series, *Rurouni Kenshin*, about a former assassin who seeks redemption during the Meiji era.

Details of the investigation reveal the severity of the matter. Not only did police find several DVDs containing child pornography at his Tokyo office, a search of his home uncovered approximately 100 more. Under Japanese law, people found to possess explicit videos or photographs of real children can be imprisoned for 1 year and fined up to 1 million yen (\$8,900 in US dollars).

While Watsuki has yet to be formally arrested or convicted, the charges have justifiably cast a heavy shadow over Watsuki's work. Earlier this fall, he launched a continuation of *Rurouni Kenshin* in *Shueisha's Jump Square* magazine. But now the publisher has suspended serialization from the December issue onward. The charges also affected the live action film adaptations of the series when a Japanese TV satellite channel cancelled its planned broadcast of the movie trilogy.

What makes these charges so shocking to fans is that Watsuki's work gave no overt indication of his predilections. If the subject of the investigation been a creator of lolicon manga, most people would not be surprised. Unfortunately, this news has prompted fans to look back at Watsuki's work and wonder about certain choices such as drawing a *Rurouni Kenshin* character to appear 13 when she was in fact 16.

On a contextual note, the production, transport, import, and export of child pornography has been outlawed in Japan since

1999. This measure also bans the possession of child pornography for those purposes. In 2014, Japan passed another law banning the simple possession of child pornography, closing this obvious loophole in the first piece of legislation. I point this out because discussions about the charges against Watsuki inevitably bring up the idea that "child porn was just made illegal in Japan a couple years ago" as if that somehow excuses or explains away his actions. But as demonstrated by the 1999 law, that assertion is neither correct nor accurate unless we consider 1999 to be a couple years ago, which we should not. - VV

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## Harassment in Comics

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Five more women have spoken to BuzzFeed following their initial report on former DC Editor Eddie Berganza's history of sexual harassment. That original piece, which proved to be high-profile enough to persuade the company to fire Berganza, has now been bolstered by supporting statements which further build on the timeline of harassment reported by former employees and freelancers working for DC.

The new statements include one from Molly McIsaac, who told that BuzzFeed how Berganza insinuated that sleeping with him would help her get work at DC. This again took place mainly at conventions, during a time when McIsaac was working as a reporter and photographer at comics events. Berganza allegedly made several advances, always laced with the offer of work or potential work, and asked her to his hotel room in order to talk over the details - which McIsaac refused.

Berganza has not made any kind of public statement since being fired by DC in November.

Comics writer and television producer Andrew Kreisberg was fired last month by Warner Bros Television following statements made by 19 people about sexual harassment experienced during his time working for the company. This means he has been cut entirely from work on *Supergirl*, *Arrow*, *The Flash*, *Legends of Tomorrow*, and *Vixen*, and any pending development deals he had in the works have likely been cancelled. His producing partner Greg Berlanti, who wrote a widely-circulated piece supporting the women and

men who wrote against Kreisberg, will be taking over duties on all the above-named shows.

Writer Stephanie Cooke wrote on Twitter about harassment she received from Nathan Edmondson, who previously wrote for publishers including Marvel, DC, and Image Comics. Edmondson approached her at a convention several years ago and struck up conversation, and was inadvertently offered as a tour guide for the area by someone with her. Edmondson subsequently wrote to her privately and asked her to go to his hotel room, which she says she rejected only to be told “it wasn’t a request.”

Meeting him the next day out of obligation to provide him with the tour that’d been offered, she recalls that he made a demonstration of trying to give her a spare hotel key in public, before trying to force her to have dinner with him. Writer Joe Keatinge, who was dating Cooke at the time, wrote on Twitter to confirm her story and to say that he confronted Edmondson about the incident. Edmondson apparently admitted to everything - although subsequently continued to harass women, it appears, because other women have subsequently responded to Cooke’s Twitter thread and explicitly named Edmondson as someone who has sexually intimidated them in public arenas as well.

Shon Bury, the founder of Space Goat Productions, has been named as an abusive presence in the workforce by several former employees across the last month, who have spoken up to discuss sexist and ableist comments made routinely in the office. Space Goat Productions handle comics as part of their remit, and currently hold the license to *Evil Dead 2* (for complicated reasons, this is different to the license held by Dynamite for *Army of Darkness*) amongst others in their portfolio.

In addition to comments made on Twitter by former employee Amelia Thompson - who says she ultimately left the company as a result of Bury’s attitude - several freelance creatives have spoken of issues with late payments made from the company for work rendered. The teams for two both *Moonlighters* and *Monster Elementary*, two comics published by the company, have written on Twitter their support for Thompson, as well as noting the issues they allege with contracted payments being missed.

The official Space Goat Twitter page publicly responded firstly by writing to Comicosity owner Matt Santori to call Thompson “clearly disgruntled” and describing her comments as “highly illegal slander.” Of course, we should note that slander only relates to spoken comments and not written statements. That tweet was

removed and then replaced by a more generic apology and a statement sent to Bleeding Cool which concluded “This isn’t on anyone else in my organization but me. This is squarely, 100% on me.” So perhaps not quite the slander originally stated, it appears.



In a piece by Rosie Knight for WomenWriteAboutComics, publisher and writer Taneka Stotts discussed an incident at this year’s San Diego Comic-Con in which Charles “Zan” Christiansen of Northwest Press initiated a one-sided physical altercation after she asked him to take down a poster of her work. This was at the Prism Comics booth, which had a poster advertising the *Beyond* comics anthology she co-published and which Prism have sold in the past. With Prism having no rights to continue to advertise a comic they were not responsible for, Stotts went to their booth and asked that the poster be taken down, and was met with condescension and inaction from the booth volunteers.

Ultimately Christiansen came and argued with her, before angrily taking the poster off the wall and forcibly pushing it into her chest. Christiansen immediately apologized to Stotts, the account recalls, recognizing this as assault. When Stotts wrote to Prism subsequently about the incident, she says their response was poor. In fact, Knight notes that it was only when she engaged with the company ahead of the WWAC article being published that an apology was given to Stotts. Prism have subsequently stated that Christiansen will no longer publicly represent the company at conventions.

Image Comics have sub-announced that editor Scott Allie has been replaced as co-editor for their upcoming *Where We Live* benefit

anthology, which will be raising money for the victims of this year's mass shooting in Las Vegas. The news comes after outcry at the original announcement which revealed Allie's involvement on the series despite his noted history of harassment at comics conventions, which was widely reported online. Editor Will Dennis will take his place on the book instead. - SWM

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## Publisher News

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Speaking of comic book benefit projects, Lion Forge have announced an anthology called *Puerto Rico Strong* which is planned for 2018. All proceeds from the issue will be used to help those affected by Hurricane Maria earlier in the year. Lion Forge's own Desiree Rodriguez, will be editing the project alongside Marco Lopez, Neil Schwartz, and Derek Ruiz, and creators including Vita Ayala and Fabian Nicieza have already been announced as working on pieces for the project.

*Puerto Rico Strong* is planned for release in March 2018, and Lion Forge have repeatedly said on social media that they are currently taking submissions - especially from comics creators who are from Puerto Rico themselves. More to come on this one. - SWM

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Marvel are forming what nobody else is describing as an Armenian flag-worth of X-Men titles in 2018, with the addition of *X-Men Red* to their line alongside *X-Men Gold* and *X-Men Blue*. This book stars the resurrected OG Jean Grey, as she forms a team to go and do some kind of mutant type stuff. With Tom Taylor writing, it's no surprise that the team includes Wolverine and Gabby, along with Namor, Nightcrawler, Gentle, and a new character called Trinary. I'm pretty convinced Trinary is the St. Croix sisters, but time will tell on that. With Mahmud Asrar as artist at launch, the first issue is expected in February.

It'll be followed by *New Mutants*, a limited series from the team of Matt Rosenberg and Adam Gorham which will run for six issues starting in March. Each issue will tell a standalone mystery story, with an overarching narrative slowly coming together regarding Karma, one of the original *New Mutants* characters. You might think a detective series is a strange situation for the New Mutants, but handily the series has navigated that obstacle by making this basically *X-Factor* in all but name. Rictor, Strong Guy and

Wolfsbane are all reuniting here, with Magik adding a second original New Mutant to the team. Boom Boom is also involved, rounding out the advertised cast of characters. Oh, there's also a *New Mutants* movie coming out next year, in case you hadn't guessed. -SWM

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But while Marvel is exploring the whole color wheel through X-Men books, they're proving to be less expansionary in other parts of their superhero line. Their March 2018 solicits seem to indicate cancellations for a slew of lower-selling books, including

*Unbelievable Gwenpool*, *Generation X*, *Iceman*. The lack of a solicit for *America* and the foreboding "Farewell" solicit for *Hawkeye* may also indicate these books are set to end, but that is unconfirmed as of writing.

Notably, these books (aside from *Gwenpool? Maybe?*) are designed to appeal to a younger, more diverse comics reading audience and their absence in Marvel's lineup would significantly reduce the number of women, LGBTQ people, and people of color creating comics for the company. - MP

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"Firebug," a short piece first featured in the *Island* anthology at Image, is being expanded into a full length graphic novel in March. Johnnie Christmas and Tamra Bonvillain will continue on the story they first created, which centers on a volcano goddess called Keegan and the fates which surround her. She is prophesied to either be humanity's salvation...or its destruction. The story will follow her journey as she attempts to

return to the lost city from which she draws her powers, even as forces conspire against her. The OGN is set for release in March 2018. - SWM

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Seven Seas recently revealed that they will be releasing three Devilman titles by Go Nagai within the next year. They include the

original *Devilman* manga, its standalone sequel *Devilman vs Hades*, and the modern reimagining *Devilman Grimoire*.

Considered by many to be Go Nagai's defining work, *Devilman* tells the story of a kind-hearted boy named Akira who gains a demon's powers and uses those abilities to protect the world from other demons. - VV

Viz Media plans to bring two more previously digital-only titles to print. *The Promised Neverland*, by Posuka Demizu (artist) and Kaiu Shirai (writer), follows a group of orphans who discover the horrifying truth of the world that exists beyond the walls of the comfortable orphanage where they live. *Astra Lost in Space* by Kenta Shinohara is a sci-fi space survival adventure story about a group of teenagers who attend a space camp, only to be transported into the depths of space and must find their way back home.

VIZ Media's boys love imprint, SuBLime, will be releasing *A Strange and Mystifying Story*, which was previously out of print. The manga follows a man who falls terminally ill and accidentally summons a god, who promises to cure him. - VV

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Avery Hill have closed out 2017 by revealing their publishing plans for 2018, continuing their growth within the UK comics scene whilst reaching out to find artists working internationally. Chief amongst them is Tillie Walden, the cartoonist “discovered” by the publisher and with whom Avery Hill have now released four books since 2015. The fifth work from the MNT-endorsed artist will be a print edition of her acclaimed webcomic *On A Sunbeam*, which was completed by Walden earlier this year. Described best as a queer sci-fi space opera, the print edition of the work - which was Eisner nominated this year - is set to be published by Avery Hill in Autumn 2018.

Elsewhere, 2018 will also see the final issue of *Metroland* by Julia Scheele and Ricky Miller, with issue #4 planned for March. Then, we have *Permanent Press* by Luke Healy planned for April 2018, a semi-autobiographical look at themes including community, art, fame and expression. June brings *The Great North Wood* by Tim Bird, a fascinating sounding comic about the memories left behind in the trees which stand tall whilst the world goes on around them.

We'll also have a new project from Seekan Hui that same month, following a young woman who works as a nanny. Her latest job sees her working for a couple who have a fixation on memory, which tumbles over into her life when one of the photos she takes seems to bring about a life of its own. Finally, Katriona Chapman's latest

is set for September 2018, and will be called *Follow Me In*. This will be Chapman's first graphic novel, and is an autobiographical travelogue as it follows her and her boyfriend going on a trip to Mexico, to see if they can repair fractures in their relationship. - SWM



Japanese publisher Shueisha announced that its flagship magazine *Weekly Shonen Jump* would be unveiling its next round of manga oneshots in 2018. Fans will spot some familiar names in the lineup: Naoshi Komi who wrote the romantic comedy *Nisekoi*, Ryuhei Tamura who created the supernatural manga *Beelzebub*, and Nisio Isin who is better known from his light novels, which include the *Monogatari* series and *Juni Taisen: Zodiac War*. Perhaps the most famous of the mangaka set to premiere new manga oneshots next year, however, is Tite Kubo, the creator of *Bleach*.

*Weekly Shonen Jump* periodically uses manga oneshots to test new concepts with readers

before committing to a full series. No doubt fans

are eager to see what Kubo's new manga will be but speaking for myself, I hope that Tamura's new venture will be better than the short-lived *Hungry Marie*. - VV

Longtime marketing manager Mel Caylo has rather abruptly left BOOM! Studios, as revealed by Caylo himself on his Twitter feed in early December. Caylo - the man who taught me the correct way to write "BOOM! Studios" - is a popular figure in the industry, and no explanation was given for the sudden news. Originally working for Archaia Press in 2009, when the company was acquired by BOOM in 2013 Caylo made the move over and joined the larger

team, and has been one of their more prominent employees ever since. Caylo has stated that he is now looking for new work, which may be within comics or elsewhere. It seems likely that several publishers will be interested in picking him up. - SWM

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LINE Webtoon, digital comics publisher, and Legendary Comics have announced that they are expanding their partnership to include two new titles and a second season for the series *Firebrand*. The headlining title of this expansion is *Cursed*, a fantasy series that delves into Scottish mythology and starring John Barrowman (*Arrow*, *Torchwood*, *Doctor Who*). This partnership will also introduce LINE Webtoon readers to the new series *Rob*, which is a medieval action adventure story by Richard Dinnick. Finally, the second season of *Firebrand: The Initiation of Natali Presano*, the supernatural series from Jessica Chobot, host of Nerdist News, author/producer Erika Lewis, and artist Claudia Aguirre.

"It has been awesome working with LINE Webtoon to propel the success of *Firebrand*, the platform has such a devoted base of readers and we love getting to interact with our fans each week. We can't wait to see the response for these new titles as we continue to broaden the scope of our work together," said Robert Napton of Legendary Comics.

All three titles will be available exclusively to LINE Webtoon readers in 2018 and can be accessed through their app, which can be downloaded via the Apple App store and also Google Play. - KT

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Amidst crowdfunding period for one graphic novels, the Chicago-based Iron Circus Comics has announced its acquisition of two more for its future lineup. Niki Smith's *Crossplay*, an erotic graphic novel described as "a love letter to fandom," has been twice-over funded as of writing, under two weeks since the Kickstarter project's launch.

*Banned Book Club* marks the publisher's first autobiographical and South Korea-based work. Writers and wife-husband duo Kim Hyun Sook and Ryan Estrada tell the former's story as the co-runner of a secret college banned book reading club under a military dictatorship. Per Estrada's tweets, his wife was "passing [banned

books] out like Oprah.” South Korean artist Ko Hyung-Ju will illustrate the graphic memoir. It’s slated for release in 2019.

The publisher’s second announcement came with a teaser for *Hex Americana*, a queer witch rally racing graphic novel by comics creator and game developer Brian Wolf. This self-described “boy meets ghoul” story will release in 2020. - JEC

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## Conventions

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The first-ever Anime NYC was held in mid-November and like other conventions, it brought a slew of announcements from North American manga publishers. Of these, Seven Seas contributed an impressive amount. Some of the titles include a hardcover omnibus of Leiji Matsumoto's classic *Space Battleship Yamato* manga trilogy, which spawned an anime adaptation that U.S. fans may know as *Star Blazers*; the *Tenchi Muyo* light novels, based on the popular 90s era anime; and *Ojojojo* by coolkyousinnjya, the creator of *Miss Kobayashi's Dragon Maid*. More notably, the publisher is also adding more LGBTQ manga to their catalog. Next year, Seven Seas will be releasing *Claudine*, about a man assigned female at birth in historical France by Riyoko Ikeda, best known for *The Rose of Versailles*, and *The Bride was a Boy*, an autobiographical manga by Chii.

VIZ Media announced their own LGBTQ manga acquisition: *That Blue Sky Feeling* by Okura and Coma Hashii, a coming of age story about a high school transfer who hears rumors that one of his new classmates is gay. In addition, the company will be releasing a print edition of the *My Hero Academia* spin-off, *Vigilantes*, which is currently being published digitally.

Yen Press also made several announcements. The major highlights include *Star Wars: Lost Stars*, which is the first officially licensed Star Wars manga in almost a decade. Illustrated by Yuusaka Kamiyama, the manga is an adaptation of the 2015 young adult novel by Claudia Gray. Other properties mentioned among the publisher’s announcements are: *Fruits Basket Another* by Natsuki Takaya, another TOKYOPOP rescue; *Little Witch Academia* by Yoh

Yoshinari (writer) and Terio Teri (artist), and *Final Fantasy VII: On the Way to a Smile* by Nojima Kazushige.

And to round out new acquisitions from the major North American manga publishers, Kodansha announced three new titles. *Lovesick Ellie* by Fujimomo is a shoujo romance about a plain girl

who discovers that her crush may not be all that he seems. *My Brother the Shut-In* by Kinoko Higure touches on the hikikomori phenomenon from the perspective of a teenage girl whose brother suddenly decides to give up the lifestyle. And, finally, *Golosseum* by Yasushi Baba about a world where wars have been transformed into martial arts battle royales. The final title is worth mentioning because some of the characters may bear some resemblances to existing world leaders. Are manga readers ready for a muscle-bound Vladimir Putin doppelganger? We'll find out next spring. - VV



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Comic-Con Arabia will be taking place in Riyadh for the first time from November 23-25. The event is being organized by Events Oasis and Panache Middle East and will be held at the Riyadh International Convention and Exhibition Center. Special guests include *Justice League* and *Game of Thrones* star Jason Momoa, rapper Quasai and many others.

According to the convention's organizers, "Comic-Con Arabia's audience will be entertained with an eclectic selection of activities including two cosplay competitions, challenging e-sports tournaments and food from a delicious medley of food-trucks, and shop for some exclusive collectibles inspired by the exhilarating world of anime, manga, graphic novels, video games, toys, TV shows and films."

The events include a cosplay contest during which regional cosplayers will have the opportunity to compete against each other for a cash prize of SR7,000 (\$1870) each and a number of other activities for those attending. - KT

# Mark Morales on Demystifying the Art of Inking in Comics

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Steve Morris

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One of the most accomplished inkers in the business, Mark Morales has been working in comics since the early 90s, and studied under the greats of the business: Will Eisner, Gene Colan, Harvey Kurtzman and more. After graduating from New York School of Visual Arts, Mark started out as an assistant for Joe Rubenstein before picking up his first published comics work in 1993. He's subsequently worked extensively for publishers including Marvel, DC, and Image, including books like *Wolverine*, *Invincible*, and the upcoming and anticipated new *Snagglepuss* series which starts later this month.

I met Mark at New York Comic-Con a few years ago, and it's immediately clear just how passionate and engaged he is with his work. His energy translates directly into his pages, as he traditionally still works by hand on paper rather than digitally, and has a signature ability to convey the careful, precise lines of the artists he's worked with over the years. The result is a detailed final page which benefits from the boost of kineticism pushed into the work through his inks. He's inventive, innovative, and has done as much to boost the profile of inking as anybody in the industry today - even now, he regularly posts process videos of his work on YouTube so people can see how a page goes from pencils to final inks.

Inking has always been an overlooked art within comics, but the rise of initiatives highlighting the work of pencillers and colorists seems to now be reaching across to the work done by people like Mark. To go into his process and technique in a little more detail, I spoke to him about his career to date, his current creative process, and the role of inkers in the industry in 2017 and beyond.

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**So many people have worked in inking as part of their comics career - what do you think makes inking such a good entryway for new and upcoming talents to gain an understanding of comics process?**

Inking is fun! Using all the various tools in your arsenal to make black lines on paper to visualize a street scene, alien planet or anything is challenging and exciting. Traditionally, having a strong black and white image is the cornerstone of any successful comic page. Up until the 90's where computer technology made it able to print comics straight from the pencils, you had to ink the pages so it could be reproduced. So you had many great artists who knew how to throw the ink down in many different, but equally effective, styles.

From the newspaper strip guys like Foster, Caniff, Sickles, to the early comic guys like Eisner, Wood, and Davis to the later masters like Wrightson, Smith, Nowlan, and Hughes. All do the inks differently, but it all looks glorious. Learning how to effectively do an image in black and white with ink is challenging, but necessary for comics.

**It feels like we're getting to see inkers start to receive the rising recognition from readers that colorists have been enjoying over the last few years. Do you feel like there is a growing appreciation for the role of inkers as part of the comic creation process?**

I don't know if I actually agree with that. There certainly has been a lot of rising recognition for colorists (and rightfully so...many are doing amazing, amazing work), but I don't know if the same can be said for inkers. There are a few things, like the Inkwell Awards, which try to put a spotlight on what inkers do. But overall, I don't know if the recognition has really gone up over the years.

One of the reasons for it is that it's just hard at times to quantify what a inker does in the traditional penciler/inker combination. If you ask a fan what a inker does, he will have 100 different ideas on

what it means. With colorists, it's a bit more simple to wrap your brain around. A colorist “colors” the book. Simple. Explaining inking is harder.

Thankfully, due to technology, a lot of inkers, like me, are posting videos showing the process and hopefully de-mystifying what we do. I've gotten a really nice response to the stuff I post on

Instagram and Twitter. People seem to enjoy seeing how the it's done. Maybe one day after we show enough people more of the process, and they understand it, we can get that #inkerappreciationday going!

The actual process of inking, though...perhaps remains a little mysterious and secret? I always wonder about it, anyway. What's your typical working environment? Are you sat down at a desk, working on physical pages? Or is inking now a digital process?

With me, it's still a old timey, hands on, pen, brush, and ink on paper process. I've tried a bunch of digital tools, but I always go back to the old way. My working environment at the moment is a mess since I recently moved, but it's a pretty typical artist setup. Big drawing table, computer, scanner/printer, lots of supplies, bottles of inks and probably too many papers strewn about.

What are the actual tools of an inker? What equipment do you use in order to physically ink over the work of a penciller and how have those tools changed for you over time?



A page from the brand new *Snagglepuss Chronicles* #1.

Traditional inkers mostly use pens, brushes and markers, but you can use anything that can make a black or grey mark on the page. I've used sponges for rock textures, razor blades scratching into black to get a rain effect and my fingerprints to make a smoke effect. It really is a trial and error thing to see what works for the particular project. For the bulk of the stuff I do, I use the old fashioned pen nibs that you just dip in the ink and scratch away on the paper. These days I'm using the Deleter Maru pen nib and Hunt #102 nibs. With both of those nibs you can get a wide variety of lines. They are stiff enough to do tiny details, but flexible enough to do more expressive lines.

I also use a Raphael #8404 brush to fill in the black areas. When I first started inking in the 90's, I used a brush to ink mostly everything. Most of my early influences in inking were brush guys like Klaus Janson, Joe Rubinstein and Tom Palmer. After a few years I got a job at Image Comics and at the time the Scott Williams/Alex Garner/Danny Miki style of inking was popular, so to get that look I switched to using the nibs. It stuck, and I found that for me they were more versatile than just the brush.

On a more personal level, for years you were on an exclusive contract with Marvel, but I know you've recently worked with DC on titles like *Prez* and *Deathstroke*. What's it like to go from a decade of work with one company - is it a different world at DC, or did you find that you could step over without having to change your approach and style?

When I started out in the mid 90's I did a fair amount of work for DC. I did short runs on *Action Comics* with Pasqual Ferry, a few *Man of Steel* issues with Brandon Badeaux and a *JLA Annual* with Ron Garney. During that time I was bouncing between both Marvel and DC. Once I got onto *X-Men* with Leinil Yu, Marvel started giving me enough work to keep me busy and eventually it led to the exclusive contract. After my contract ended a few years back, I was eager to do some work on some other stuff. And happily, DC hired me onto a few projects including *Deathstroke* and *Prez*.

To me, there's not much difference working for either Marvel (where I'm still working) or DC or Image (where I'm currently inking *Invincible*). For me the characters aren't as important as the pencilers I'm working with are. It's always a matter of trying to mesh what you do as an inker with what the penciler does and trying to create an attractive final product. And strangely, many of editors that are now at DC worked at Marvel when I first started there. It's a very small industry still. You'll always run into someone you've worked with before.

Looking back to over a decade ago, you were on the top comic of the time - Morrison and Quitely's *New X-Men*. And then looking at your work today you've still at the top, on comics like *All-Star Batman*. What do you feel are the key skills of not only being a full-time comics inker - but also in staying on top of the medium during a time when the methods of production have changed and diversified?

I think being successful in comics is more than just having talent. Talent is very important, but not the only thing that's needed. It's mostly work ethic, being able to meet deadlines, being versatile and not being too much of a pain in the ass. I've been lucky in

many ways. I've gotten to work with a wide variety of great pencilers, both newer and older, over the years. Olivier Coipel, Jim Cheung, Steve McNiven, Leinil Yu, Ed McGuinness, John Romita Jr., Frank Quietly, Ryan Ottley, Ben Caldwell and many others.



The inked cover to *Spider-Man/Deadpool* #2 by Kelly McGuinness and Mark Morales, as shared [here](#).

To me, the key thing about being an inker is to make the penciler's work shine through and show it in its best light. I've never been the fastest inker (I can still only ink a page to page and a half a day...and that's a long day!), but I try to put as much effort into inking every page as the penciler puts into drawing it. Of course, you can't meet that goal on every page, but I try to as often as possible. I've always approached the work the same way since I started. And mostly I'm still doing it the same way, by hand. Inking is certainly a bit of a dying specialty.

Many pencilers now ink their own stuff (by hand or digitally) or just go straight from the pencils. For those pencilers, they want to have total control of the work from beginning to end. And that's understandable. But for me, that's a shame since I think a lot of the greatest mainstream comics have been produced when you have a team of highly talented pencilers and inkers working together. Many times the finished product is better than what they would have produced separately.

# Searching for a Mixed-Race Identity in Comics

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Francesca Lyn

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Francesca Lyn is a doctoral candidate in Media, Art, & Text at Virginia Commonwealth University. She is currently writing her dissertation, *Graphic Intimacies: Identity, Humor, and Trauma in Autobiographical Comics by Women of Color*. She is the author of the comic, *Flower Girls*, illustrated by Sally Cantirino.

In August 2011, Marvel announced that the new *Ultimate Spider-man* would be a mixed-race teenager named Miles Morales. Miles is a nerdy teenager from Brooklyn with a black father and a Puerto Rican mother. I would have loved to have a character like Miles Morales when I was a kid. Growing up, I learned that I was seen as somehow different. As though others felt like they had to figure me out. People tend to want to ask me who in my family is Chinese and who in my family is Jamaican. While growing up in the suburbs of South Florida, I used to say that both of my parents are Jamaican but my dad is Chinese and my mom is black. In reality it is a little more complicated than that. While my dad does look

more phenotypically Asian, his side of the family does have some black ancestry. And, my mother's father was partly Asian. So really my family has been always mixed.

In popular culture mixed-race people have been portrayed as confused, sad people that often meet tragic ends. Particular cultural emphasis is given to mixed-race women of color who can pass for white. One of the most well-known examples of this is the 1959 film *Imitation of Life*. In the film Sarah Jane is a black woman who can pass for white, while we never see her father we are to assume that her father is white or a very fair-skinned mixed-race black man. Sarah Jane dates a white man who beats her when he

finds out her true racial identity. Sarah Jane's deception and disobedience takes a physical toll on her mother who then dies. The end of the movie features a sequence where Sarah Jane throws herself onto her mother's casket and begs for her forgiveness.

*Imitation of Life* was one of the first movie I ever watched that dealt with passing and racial identity. I remember thinking that Sarah Jane was a horrible person for rejecting her mother and her blackness. I was also horrified at how much joy Sarah Jane's mother seems to take in serving her white mistress as well as planning her own elaborate funeral. *Imitation of Life's* story did not resemble anything in my own life.

Reading comics can make you feel less alone. However, I found that positive portrayals mixed-race identity are few and far between. More troubling was when I came across characters and creators that were held up as embodying a mixed-race identity but seemed to leave much to be desired.

George Herriman, best known for the influential newspaper strip *Krazy Kat* (1913-1944), is often used as an early example of a mixed-race cartoonist. However it is important to note that Herriman kept his mixed-race identity a secret for most of his adult life. Herriman's contributions to comics are unquestionable, but we don't really have much evidence that he embraced or even acknowledged his mixed-race heritage. His early work is full of racist caricature of black people. While this is understandable given the time period he lived in, it also means that holding him up as embodying a mixed-race identity is at best problematic. It just felt like *Imitation of Life* all over again.

One of the first non-tragic characters I encountered in comics was Tesla Strong, the daughter of the superhero Tom Strong. Created by Alan Moore and Chris Sprouse, the character Tom Strong is an homage to pulp heroes. Raised by scientist parents in a high-gravity chamber, Tom is orphaned and taken in by the people of Attabar Teru, a fictional West Indian island. Tom has superhuman strength and genius-level intelligence. Marries Dhalua, the daughter of the Chief of Attabar Teru. Tom and Dhalua have a daughter named Tesla and the family works together as a superpowered team. Tesla Strong is intelligent and accomplished, there is nothing tragic about her. Tesla never has to choose between her parents, she never seems confused about who she is.

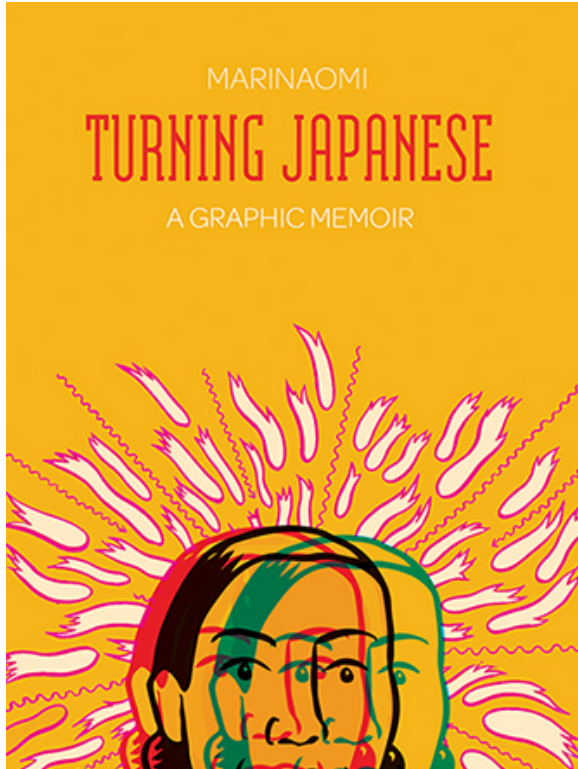
What I appreciated most about these stories was that the Strong family embraces diversity as a strength. Major antagonists like the Nazi femme fatale Ingrid Weiss are always confronted and eventually defeated. Ingrid's racist ideology is no match for the Strong family.



Recently I have found more positive representation in independent comics. This has led me seek out comics based on the lived experiences of mixed-race people of color. One of the first of these comics was *One Hundred Demons* (2002) by Lynda Barry. Published by Seattle-based Sasquatch Books, *One Hundred Demons* collects several short, self-contained stories and combines them with Barry's inventive collages. Racial identity is a major theme throughout the memoir. Barry is an American mixed-race women of color originally from Seattle, Washington. Her biracial Irish and Filipino mother was born in the Philippines while her father was white of Irish and Norwegian descent (Kirtley 15). Despite our many differences, I saw myself in Barry's stories. Even though she was a red-haired, freckled girl who grows up hearing stories about the aswang and speaking Tagalog at home, my experiences are similar. In "The Visitor" her crush assumes that she is white like he is. I have had more than a few experiences where someone has

assumed I was a different racial identity. It is always a strangely disorienting experience and Barry captures this perfectly. What I most appreciate in Barry's work is that she eschews concluding with a simple moral or neatly tied up resolution.

MariNaomi's 2016 comic *Turning Japanese* also explores what it means to be a mixed-race woman of color. MariNaomi confronts her biracial identity by working in Japanese hostess bars. By



adopting a performative and stereotypical presentation of Japanese femininity she is able to interrogate how her own identity has been formed. Mari learns Japanese and gets to know more about Japanese culture. Mari recognizes that being both white and Japanese is not a matter of either/or.

Aside from newspaper strips, my first experiences with comics were the Archie digests that were available in the grocery store. I loved Archie and all of his friends. When I read Archie, almost all of the characters were white. Today, Archie has a much more diverse cast. We now have more multiracial characters that are allowed to have complex and interesting storylines. These characters have more depth than the piteous Sarah Jane from the *Imitation of Life*. And today's comic creators no longer have to hide their racial identity like George Herriman.

Representation still has a way to go, as comics are still overwhelmingly white and male. Too often whiteness is used as a default setting. And, when characters were people of color that seemed to be their defining characteristic. I hope to see more characters that are more than just a representative of their race. Cartoonists of color are taking matters in their own hands. MariNaomi created the *Cartoonists of Color* and *Queer Cartoonists* databases, as a way to highlight these marginalized creators. Efforts like these will continue to broaden the perspectives offered in comics.

# Batman #36 Is Stiff

Megan Purdy



*Batman* #36 was all over Twitter last week, as fans shared panels and pages of two of DC's top super pals, Batman and Superman, experiencing some everyday relationship awkwardness. They love each other, see, but they don't know how to express themselves or how to get past some conflict that took place in previous issues I don't care to read. I picked up this one, though, because I had to see more. It's the art, you see. I didn't like it and I wanted to know if reading the whole issue would change my mind. It didn't.

Penciller Clay Mann and colorist Jordie Bellaire are undeniably talented. Their work here is perfectly...fine. Serviceable. Inoffensive. Unremarkable. So much so that I breeze through the issue, quick quick quick, always looking to dialogue to gauge the tenor of even the simplest panels. Bellaire is working with a muted palette: burnt, end of summer grass; the sun liminal, always rising or setting. Mann, meanwhile, zeroes in so close to the high point of every action - the longest extension of a kick or a flip; that postcard-perfect composition of Superman stopping a train, Lois arching a brow just so - that counterintuitively, the comic feels slow. Devoid of movement.

Take this page [see below], where Batman and Catwoman are storming a hideout. Batman bursts through a window. Catwoman bursts through a door. Batman...bursts through a line of thugs. Catwoman punches some fool in a hockey mask such that his teeth burst through the panel borders and right off the page. It's a carefully balanced composition with Batman at the top of the page, Catwoman at the bottom.



Things are pushed out of their panels on either side, both as the result of these characters actions. Every panel has the same empty yellow lighting against the dark. It's practiced and brisk and the substance of each panel is less important than that we move through them.

Or take this sequence, where Batman and Superman talk up their besties to their girlfriends, again. Every panel a fairly static point/counterpoint, my eyes going straight down the middle of the page; the red of the elevator shaft emergency lights the only exception to gold and blue-grey any-hotel decor. It's also the only panel that provides a perspective shift. In this comic, dialogue is king; it provides tension and motion where the artwork does not. Once they make it out of that elevator, they stop moving entirely, framed by a drugstore chocolate box of a lobby, each couple in their own frame, as they talk past each other, not quite connecting.



Thematically, that works just fine. Parallelism. Disconnection hiding a deeper connection. Etc. But the rigidity of these compositions does nothing to alleviate a similar stiffness in the dialogue. Back and forth they go, complimenting each other as their girlfriends' play easy listener, understanding partner; and every single thing about these four characters finds its counterpart in a sleepy, superfriendship dialectic. Cliffhanger: what will these opposite numbers become when they meet up in a double date?

What I don't learn from this comic is the substance of who Tom King, Clay Mann, or Jordie Bellaire think these characters are. If Superman is the sun and Batman is the moon, who are their girlfriends, Lois and Selina, positioned here as girlfriend-adjuncts, not people, an extension of a theme.

Carefully constructed as it is, this issue is boring. Monthly comics for large publishers can become a bit assembly line and not-so-interesting superhero comic art isn't exactly uncommon. But I hate to see such clockwork calculation stand in for feeling. It's always nice to see superheroes be stymied by ordinary relationship issues, but Superman and Batman's issues here don't seem quite real or lived in. This minor drama is so carefully framed it plays like a reach for apotheosis, the most Superman/Batman mild friend conflict of them all. But... why does no one in this comic even have a facial expression? There is no feeling in this exercise. This stilted issue speaks to King, Mann and Bellaire being an imperfect fit, one that ironically reflects the content of the issue - they aren't communicating. If superhero comics itself weren't so breakneck, this concept and this team might have gelled.

# Loving Bad Comics

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Christian, Jon, Kirsten, Steve, and Vernieda

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Do you like bad comics? Yeah, you do. Everyone likes at least one complete stinker. Maybe you only like stinkers. Do you feel ashamed about your terrible taste? Don't worry, neither do we.

Today the MNT team explores the issue of objective taste, and why it's good to love bad comics.

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## What is the objectively worst comic you love, and why do you love it?

**CH:** Probably *Batman: Hush*. The story is basically "Here's Batman doing Batman things. Look how awesome Batman is!" wrapped in a mystery that makes no sense and also has an incredibly obvious solution. But at the same time, it's kind of a great comic because it's just 12 issues of Batman doing awesome things! The whole Batman/Superman fight is especially silly and dumb (and also a little misogynistic) but the reveal that Batman's grand contingency plan against Superman is ultimately to drop Lois Lane off a building is still one of my favorite "LOL" moments to this day. I'm smiling just thinking about it.

**VV:** *Naruto*. Look, I know. It's the gateway series for an entire generation of manga and anime fans, but it's not as great as people think. Yes, Part 1 is awesome but Part 2 was a mess. Bad pacing. Weird narrative choices. (Aliens? Seriously?) And the worst dude ever (Sasuke) survived. Ugh. But if there's one thing Masashi Kishimoto does really well, it's characters. The characters in *Naruto* are awesome. When the series is at its best, the arcs are great: the mission to retrieve Sasuke that closes out Part 1 and the mission to rescue Gaara that launches Part 2 are two examples. Some of the fights are magnificent; the Chuunin Exam arc comes to mind. Who will ever forget the moment when Rock Lee takes off his weights and everyone's reactions? Greatness.

**KT:** I've read a LOT of 'objectively terrible' comics, but one that springs to mind is *Samurai Deeper Kyo*, not because it's wall-to-wall

awful, but because it's chock full of tropes that are by turns ridiculous and fun. There's more than a little bit of fan service, at times cringe worthy, fight scenes that can last forever, and a never ending parade of villains that want to get the better of Kyo. But sometimes you just want a book where a lot of the plot is about a

bad-ish guy fighting other baddies and coming out as the winner. As the series progresses it becomes a bit more complex, but it's definitely a go-to if you want to see the protagonists engage in epic battles and don't want to sit through too much of a plot.



**SWM:** Oh hello. Have you ever heard of this little number called “The Draco”? It’s part of the Chuck Austen era of *Uncanny x-Men*, and drawn abominably by Philip Tan. Chuck Austen’s run is hated in general, but “The Draco” is the worst of all in the eyes of the public. It isn’t a great comic, not at all, but the one thing that’s admirable about it is the way it swings for the fences. I’ve read so many X-Men comics recently that had no idea what they wanted to do, all written by white dudes from North America, and it’s nice to go back and read something that’s at least trying to be different. The worst crime a comic can commit is to be boring - it’s a waste of a month of creative work, and a waste of the opportunity, frankly. Chuck Austen got given an opportunity, and he wrote some of the strangest, stupidest,

more glorious pieces of unique superhero nonsense. At least he put something into it.

**JEC:** I can definitely second *Batman: Hush!* It was recommended to me when I first “started comics” and it’s a pretty fun and uncontroversial tour of the Batman mythos, especially for new readers.

I’m good at loving bad movies (holla *Justice League*), but not so much with loving bad comics, because comics are EXPENSIVE and I have a much tighter quality-to-budget filter with comics. HOWEVER: I do have many bad comics that I loved for a bit before I realized they were bad - both because I hadn’t fully

developed my tastes yet and the comics themselves revealed themselves to be way worse later on. This is Lobdell and Booth's *New 52 Teen Titans* run for me. Equal parts for its potential (the cast, before getting sidelined for the white heroes, was super diverse) and one character in particular: Bunker. Lobdell writes so many characters, particularly female ones, in reductive and offensive ways, but, because Bunker - a femme, kind, resilient gay teen character - was based a friend of Lobdell's in real life, Bunker escaped so much of the hackneyed writing put upon characters like Wonder Girl and Solstice. Deep in the Teen Titans garbage fire was a character type who is still otherwise wholly absent from superhero comics writ large.

**Do you feel tempted to defend the bad things you love? What's the most ludicrous defense you've ever made for a bad comic?**

**CH:** I don't feel that my tastes ever need defending, because my opinions ascend objectivity. Having grown up watching the WB, UPN, and the CW, I've always acknowledged that I love bad things and that's okay. Some people like watching documentaries, I like watching absolutely gorgeous people fight and make out and get strung along in convoluted plotlines that make no sense.

Probably the craziest defense of a comic I've ever made was for Spencer and Eisma's *Morning Glories*. The comic is basically LOST set in a prep school and all the characters' faces look alike. None of it made any sense, but I read it for a while because I wanted to see the main character hook up with her nerdy friend. When people asked me WTF was going on with it, I just rambled on about how it was SO DEEP with its time travel and liberal use of biblical names, when I probably should have admitted that I didn't know what it was about, I was just in it to see if the blonde hooked up with the nerd.

**VV:** Not really? I unironically love *Vampire Hunter D* and I even read the original books which are...not of the best quality, let's just say. On multiple levels. I guess I've never felt the need to defend my taste in things and I fully acknowledge that some of the things I like are kind of trashy. Or a lot trashy.

Instead of outright defending a bad comic I like, I tend to instead talk about what aspect is nonsense but then go on to elaborate on what I like about it anyway. I know. This is boring and reasonable.

**KT:** No, if I love something that's terrible, I freely acknowledge it, but I don't feel the need to apologize for it. I mean, I've watched a LOT of horror movies and sci-fi shows which were horrendous and enjoyed them while admitting that they were utterly ridiculous. I tend to expand on what I like about a thing, even if it's objectively awful, or recommend a thing based on its level of absurdity.



**SWM:** I go the opposite way, actually. When there's a weighted mass of internet roundly declaring something as bad, I tend to go quiet and just secretly like the things that I like. An example - Injustice, the original run. A few critics seized on parts of the original concept, which included Lois Lane being killed off, and declared the comic as objectively bad and morally awful. Personally, my thought is that Injustice is a "what if" storyline and over the years has taken a dodgy conceit and consistently used it to bring in some fascinating character work, fun dialogue, and fun storytelling. But everybody tells me it's bad, and I shouldn't like it, so I go quiet about it online. I don't feel that great about it.

**JEC:** Absolutely not, especially since "bad" often means "offensive." I don't want to accidentally cheer someone into a trap. But I do try to approach a story fairly, and acknowledge its strengths and flaws so people resistant to some flaws or enamored by certain strengths can partake appropriately.

And I feel you, Steve! I'm in a similar place with *Avengers Arena*, Marvel's Battle Royale - for Teens! A series where teens are killed off as part of a premise is always going to push people away, and I don't fault those who are, but there's some devastatingly good character work in that series and, unsurprisingly, given me, a really complex and interesting gay teen character in Cullen Bloodstone. But I can never evangelize him like I'd like because: *Avengers Arena*.

#### Why is loving bad things good and right?

**CH:** I think loving bad things is the purest sense of escapism there is. The world is shit right now and the only way to stay sane is to

have some sort of distraction from all the wretched awfulness. And sometimes you just need to turn your mind off and read a bunch of comics that requires zero thinking or watch a cartoon solely because you find their irreverent fart jokes hilarious.

Plus, loving bad things reminds me that my tastes are no better than anyone else's. Sure, I'll never understand anyone who has watched more than 4 episodes of *NCIS* but I actively watch *Attack on Titan*, so...

**VV:** We like what we like. It's good to embrace that part about ourselves, even when it means we end up liking garbage. For example, I love a lot of seinen manga. I like the plots. I like the action. I like the themes. But being seinen manga, there's often a lot of random nudity and sex and gratuitous t&a. And maybe this isn't a big deal to North American comic book readers who grew up on superhero titles featuring women with no spines and no ribcages, it's a little WTF at times. I fully understand and respect people who'll stop reading for those very same reasons. No hate. But if there's one thing I love, it's stylized graphic violence and seinen manga consistently fulfills that desire.

...Maybe that's why I also keep returning to *Attack on Titan* - which is not a seinen manga, to be clear - even though the manga frustrates me to no end. I just want to see Levi kill things. Anything.

**KT:** I think that enjoying things, even if they aren't Great Art is important to help you de-stress and frankly sometimes you just want to read a comic or manga where there's a semblance of an interesting plot that gets derailed for random grandstanding or convoluted emotional arcs.

**SWM:** Because everybody consistently gets told that they're wrong to do what they do and like what they like. People should just read what they want to read, even if that does mean they own the full run of Chuck Austen's *X-Men*.

**JEC:** "Bad" media makes me a better reader and critic! It allows me to feel out what I like, what others like, what flaws don't matter to me, and what strengths do. It's a better mirror for my interests and tastes than most five-star media, for sure.



The MNT is produced by Christian Hoffer, Steve Morris, Megan Purdy, Kirsten Thompson, and Vernieda Vergara, with logo design work from Nick Hanover.

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Features: Steve Morris, Megan Purdy & Kirsten Thompson.

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