

HYPOTHETICALS 6 - FINAL SCRIPT AS USED

Lee "Budgie" Barnett

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Good afternoon, everyone and welcome to the sixth annual **Hypotheticals** panel. For the thirty-seven of you who haven't attended one of these previously or who only have an old copy of **Watchmen** with an even *older* photo of me on the back, I'm Dave Gibbons. No, I am, honestly.

So what *is Hypotheticals*? Well, for the next hour or so, we're going to take some ethical dilemmas that can occur in the comic book industry and see how a distinguished panel {pause} well, *this lot* anyway, would deal with them.

What ethical dilemmas? Well, for example, suppose you're a letterer and are assigned to a Brian Bendis book. Should you ask to get paid by the word? And if you're an artist and get the opportunity to work with Grant Morrison, should you or he buy the first lot of drugs?

In previous years, we've looked at relationships between creators and fans, and between creative teams themselves; we've had scenarios dealing with fanfics, the 'real world', conventions, exclusive contracts, and charity books... We even had an earthquake leaving a major city in devastated ruins in real life, while a comics company is publishing just that storyline. That led, by the way, to one artist panellist to suggest that at least it would give him decent photo reference material...

Artists, eh?

But before you see what Budgie and I have come up with this year, the usual disclaimer: everyone here is appearing in a **personal** capacity. Nothing they say should be taken as representative of their individual companies or as an indication of what they might do if the hypothetical scenarios we're going to play out really came across their desks on Monday morning.

And, as always, Budgie and I ask that the answers remain within this room. Thanks.

OK - so to the panel.

Making his debut on the panel is **JOE CASEY**. Joe's has written some of the biggest characters in comics. His runs on **Superman** and **Wildcats** were well-received by critics and fans alike. Joe once said in an interview that he enjoyed taking low-tier projects and building them up. So of course, he was an obvious invite for *this* panel.

Also making his first appearance here is **MIKE OEMING**. Co-creator, with Brian Bendis, of **Powers**, and artist on, among other things, **Bastard Samurai**, Mike started his career inking at Innovation Comics at the age of 14 and his creator-owned urban crime drama, **Wings of Anansi**, hits the shelves in August. Also co-creator of **Hammer of the Gods**, Mike's an ex-security guard {Dave takes a long, slow look at Mike} but I think I could take him.

{Pause} Anyway, moving on...

JAMIE BOARDMAN is Graphics Novels Editor at Titan Books. Jamie's career started off when he met an editor going into a pub and thought "what a great career - going into

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pubs!" Having worked at Titan and Rebellion for some years, Jamie's well qualified to answer the most pressing question in UK comics: "where the hell is Zenith?" To which the answer, as you might expect, is: "sitting in a warehouse".

ANTONY JOHNSTON appeared on this panel in 2002, and it's taken three years... for his career to recover. Writer of such critically acclaimed books as **Julius**, **Closer**, **Spooked** and **The Long Haul**, Antony's next work is **Queen & Country: Declassified**.

Making a welcome return to the panel is **CRAIG MCGILL**, a journalist working for the Scottish Mirror. Those who attended last year's panel will no doubt remember Craig's example of how a tabloid could mount a campaign *against* comic books. Since last year, Craig's become a father, to which the only sane response has to be "*will no-one think of the child?*"

For those who have asked, there's no **CHRIS FRANCIS** on the panel this year; events on Earth prime have postponed his travel to Earth-Dave for 24 hours, but you'll all have a chance to tell him tomorrow that he missed the best panel yet, won't you?

Lee "**BUDGIE**" Barnett devised the panel and wrote the hypotheticals. With stories for **Trailer Park Of Terror** and **X-Men Unlimited**, a comedy super-hero novel entitled **You'll Never Believe A Man Can Fly** published online by SBC last year, and a weekly column on Comicon's **Pulse**, there's just no start to his talents, even leaving aside his real life job as Financial Director of a television channel. Budgie's a writer whose jokes I just can't get enough of. In fact, I hardly get any of them at all.

Ladies and Gentlemen... our panel.

[cue applause]

And so it's welcome back again to "Earth-Dave", that strange place where things are similar but not exactly the same as on the Earth you're used to: on Earth-Dave, the crossover titles get shorter every year, Rob Leifeld studied anatomy, and comic book readers don't complain about the price of comic books. It's a strange place, I tell you.

On Earth-Dave, of course, the major comic book company is Wonder Comics, who specialise in super-hero comics. And they even occasionally send editors to UK comics conventions. Just imagine that...

Anyway, the year is 2005... the date May 14th. So let's start...

Jamie Boardman - Welcome to the panel. You're sitting at your desk one day and you receive a letter from someone asking for a long out-of-print series to be reprinted. Your immediate reaction is...?

While you're thinking of how to reply, you're told by your boss of a possible reason to reprint it. Wonder Comics have contacted the company and are interested in the rights to publish a new series based upon the concept. What does that do to your thoughts on the request?

Joe Casey - the idea has come from you, since you're a fan of the original material. Let's call the book **The McGuffin**. The book was created in the 1960s and is a creature of its time. Would you be looking, in a new version, to pay homage to the original creative

vision, or would you be looking to use only the *names* of the characters with a 21st Century revamp?

Mike Oeming - You're asked by Joe to join him on the pitch. Assuming that you're going to want to update the costume, what would you consider when creating a super-hero costume from scratch?

Craig - Welcome back. Rants all prepared? Good. OK, who do you blame for...? No. We'll save that for later. **Craig** - You're writing an op-ed column for an online site. You've heard something very interesting about *why* Wonder Comics is interested in the pitch by Joe and Mike. Because by a *remarkable* coincidence, their interest is because it ties in to their big summer 'event', a crossover involving every single comic they publish. They *tried* to involve comics they don't publish, but ran into rights problems... So, Craig, would you break the news while the negotiations are still going on?

Joe - **Craig** does publish the news, but is rather disparaging about your abilities to pay suitable tribute to this classic out-of-print character. Would you respond, or just let it slide?

Mike - On the other hand, **Craig's** incredibly complimentary about *your* involvement, saying that your style is similar to the original artist. Would the praise make you more eager to work on the project?

Budgie - you're the Chief Financial Officer of Wonder Comics, otherwise known in the trade as "that bastard who says NO." You're very hands on, and BIG projects come to your department from the sales department with full budgets for expected sales and costs. What would be the reason for the company going forward with a company-wide crossover, and would your office have any say in it at all anyway?

Anyway, the decision to go ahead is made and news starts leaking out on the internet and through the media.

Craig McGill - you're still writing for the comics news site. Another company-wide crossover? Are the comics reading public eager - what are likely to be the responses from those online? Joy? Despair? Cynicism?

Antony Johnston - You've just started work on a mid-tier book for Wonder Comics. You've an opening 12 issue arc that has been approved by the powers-that-be. You're happy, aren't you?

So there you are, happily working on the script for issue six when the news comes down from editorial: issue nine will now be a crossover issue. What's your immediate reaction?

You're informed by your editor that your character cast will be pretty central to a minor, though important, sub-plot within the overall crossover. The writer of the crossover also pitched for the title you have, but you got it.

In fact, it's now intended that one of your supporting cast is to be killed off during the crossover. Would your reaction differ as to whether you liked the character or not?

Joe - What about you? Suppose you were in Antony's position. A character in your cast is about to be killed off by editorial fiat. If it's a work-for-hire job, where you didn't create the characters, does it matter?

Back to **Antony**. Now, you *didn't* create the character, but you quite like having him around. In fact, although the readers haven't realised it yet, you're going to reveal that the character's gay. The only person that knew this is your editor. Moreover, you had a storyline planned after the initial twelve-issue arc dealing with how other characters in the book react to the revelation. How strongly would you be protesting against the character's killing? And to whom would you complain?

The editor comes back with the comment: "Well, have another character come out as gay then." Your reaction?

OK, well then the editor listens to your concerns (hey, an editor listening to a writer - this *must* be on Earth Dave!) and says instead "Well, ok, but make him a minor character, and write him out after the arc." Would you be happier with that?

We'll return to this in a minute. But in the meantime...

Joe Casey - it's expected by the writer of the main storyline of the crossover that your character, **The McGuffin**, will be incorporated into the Wonder Comics universe of characters. Wonder Comics are really enthusiastic about this. Only one thing: since **The McGuffin** is British, they're concerned about getting the character 'right' and want you to work with a British writer for dialogue and characterisation.

Do you think that only a British writer can write British characters, or an American writer American characters?

Mike - As an artist who's worked with several writers, is there something different between British writers and American writers? Well, apart from the amount of alcohol involved in the creative process?

Antony - you're the writer Wonder Comics wants to use to assist Joe. What are *your* thoughts on writing characters from different cultures?

Jamie - while this is going on, you get an invitation to dinner by an editor at Wonder Comics. They offer you a job as Antony's editor on the mid-tier book with the mandate to increase sales of the book. Would you be interested? Now, you've known Antony for *years*; would one of your considerations be whether to replace him on the book if you could get a bigger name?

In the middle of all of this, **Budgie**, you have an idea. A creative idea from an accountant? Perish the thought. (*cough* **Enron** *cough*). You've noticed a recent upturn in trade paperback sales of a crossover Wonder Comics did in 1995. And since the crossover being mooted uses many of the same characters, wouldn't it be a *fabulous* idea to make it a sequel to the previous event? Well, wouldn't it?

Well, the writer of the new event doesn't like the idea of linking it, and walks from the project. Wonder Comics goes back to the original writer of the crossover... who just happens to be **Joe Casey**.

Joe Casey - Fancy revisiting old triumphs?

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The artist you worked with on that series, that legend of the industry, Joe Inkslapper, is no longer working in comics, and so by a remarkable coincidence, Mike Oeming is asked to do the crossover.

Mike - are you interested in being part of this? Why? Or why *not*?

Joe - You agree to write it and the first item of business, purely because he's sitting a few feet from you right now, is Antony's protest at killing off 'his' character.

Now this is a different question from that of a moment ago - now *you're* the one making the final decision. How do you feel about killing off a character being written by another writer?

Would you feel that you owed any loyalty to the original creator of the character, assuming that he's still alive?

As it happens, while you're deciding what to do, the original creator lodges a law suit claiming that the entire cast that Antony is writing wasn't created work-for-hire, but was in fact a set of characters that he owns and should get back the copyright to.

Budgie - your lawyers let *you* know about the law suit; given the potential losses to the company should the law suit succeed, what would you be doing?

Craig - You get a call from a contact inside Wonder Comics, letting you know that the law suit has been filed and the potential effects upon Wonder Comics. You've expressed online previously your disdain for the way the founding fathers of comics were treated way back when. How would you cover this? Sensationalise it? Or a sober piece?

{Dave - if he goes for the latter option, dinner's on me.} *Actually, the more I think about this, Dave, the better the gag is if you actually read that bit out.*

At the same time as Craig's writing his piece, the original creator gives an interview in which he expresses utter astonishment at the rumour that Antony intends to have a character come out as gay, saying that he created the character and the character is definitely heterosexual.

Antony - The interviewer contacts you for your comment. What do you say? He asks whether the gay character is to be shown as a positive or negative role model. *Does it make a difference or is it important to show gay characters in a positive light?*

The interviewer lets slip during the chat that the news that the character was intended to be gay was leaked to him by someone at Wonder Comics. You suspect the ex-editor of the book. Would you be upset that a storyline that hasn't yet been written has been leaked? Isn't all publicity good publicity?

Jamie - The interview gets wide publicity within the comics community... and you're now the editor of the book, getting requests from all the main sites about the book. Same question to you - isn't all publicity good publicity?

Mike Oeming - Is there a point where publicity for a forthcoming project becomes mere hype, adding heat but no light to the readers' understanding of the project?

OK... a change of pace.

The publisher of Wonder Comics, upon reading a joint pitch submitted by Warren Ellis, Grant Morrison and Garth Ennis screams once and immediately retires to breed rare llamas in the Bolivian Andes.

Joe Casey - The Big Chair is now vacant - what sort of person would you be hoping would be appointed to the job?

Mike - what about you? No, not for the position, but what experience would you want the person appointed to the role to have?

Antony - Does it matter whether or not the man or woman has worked in comics?

Jamie - Does the person have to have a love of comics? Or does the role need a head for business? And are the two mutually exclusive?

Craig?

{Read in an incredulous tone} ***Well, Budgie gets the job!*** I'm sorry, I'll read that again.

{Read in a normal tone} Well, Budgie gets the job.

A CFO appointed as Publisher of Wonder Comics. And a British CFO at that. **Joe** - any thoughts?

Budgie - Congratulations, I think. First reactions?

Oh come on, you've just heard the comments made by four people who now work for you. Anything to say to *them*? Other than "You're fired"?

When you start work, you look at the *To Do* list left by your predecessor. He, together with the Editor-In-Chief, was concerned about a creator, let's call him *David Peters*, who has stated numerous times in his blog and columns the problems he has with Wonder Comics. Would you as publisher have problems with using a creator who criticises the company?

How about if he excoriates the decision to appoint you as publisher?

Mike - You don't have a blog, but you *do* operate a message board, wherein you've recently noticed that thread drift often leads to criticisms of the companies for which you work. Would you feel comfortable with that? {If 'no', then what would you do about it?}

Joe - You also operate a message board, but you strictly limit messages to the subject matter of your own work. If you've concerns about a company policy or a book published by the company, is it hypocritical to keep such thoughts private?

Craig - You're a member of Mike's message board, and one of those who has criticised Wonder Comics, a company that's employing Mike on one of their books. Is it fair, attacking a company that's paying the person running the board?

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Budgie - You become aware of the criticisms of your appointment by comic book readers, upset, or at least wary, that another 'suit' is responsible for 'their' characters. Do you respond, and if so, how?

Jamie - Of course, you know Budgie from way back, in the days you used to both illegally drink after hours in the same pub. Would you be hoping for a shot at a bigger title because Budgie knows you?

Well, believe it or not, Budgie stays out of editorial interference (instead, of course, he *employs* someone to interfere) and the company survives his appointment.

Mike - As well as your other drawing duties, you've been working with a writer on a title dealing with the ordinary police officers in the Wonder Comics Universe. The writer is talented and part of his own promotion for the title is that he used to *be* an undercover police officer. **Mike** - Would personal experience by the writer add any enjoyment to the work?

Except, **Craig**, he - hmm, let's call him **Mister Wrong** - wasn't an undercover police officer, was he? Noooo... you discover that he *was* in the police force, but he worked in the payroll office.

The book's good - you enjoy it. So, come on, **Craig**, what would you do with the information?

Joe - Any sympathy for Mr Wrong?

Jamie - You've met Mister Wrong a number of times and he'd asked you to edit his next book, which was just about to be approved. Would this news change your answer?

Budgie - you're still, astonishingly enough, Publisher. What's your reaction?

Antony - Does it really matter whether or not Mister Wrong lied to his publisher, his editor, his fellow creators and the readers... *if the book was written well?*

Quick show of hands, audience - if the book was written well, *does* it matter?

Well, I think that's about it - just time enough to thank **Joe Casey**, **Mike Oeming**, **Jamie Boardman**, **Antony Johnston** and **Craig McGill** for taking part. I *would* thank **Budgie** for devising and writing the script, but he'd only get a big head. And, and of course, thanks to all of *you* for attending.

As always, all the best bits were ad-libs by me, despite what Budgie might have you think.

Thank you once again for flying Earth-Dave. We now return you to your normal Earth.

Thank you and good evening.