

HYPOTHETICALS 8 - FINAL VERSION ACTUALLY USED

13th May 2007

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Good afternoon, everyone and welcome to **Hypotheticals**, the panel that holds a mirror up to the comics industry, and then proceeds to give it an embarrassing haircut.

[sigh]

Eight years of this. Eight years of reading Budgie's scripts.

Eight. Years. You know, I had hair like Alan Moore's when I started this.

As I look at the panel today, I can't help remembering the first hypotheticals panel, back in 2000. Seeing the panel in their grunge fashions, the heroin chic look and the laughable hairstyles. I mean, I can't remember what they looked like back then, *obviously!*

When Budgie and I did the first one of these in 2000, the comics world was arguing about how some creators were living on past glories, how new creators can't get an even break in the industry, how the internet was changing the relationship between creator and reader, and how the major companies didn't respect their creators or their characters... My, how things have changed.

Anyway, for those of you who don't know, I'm Dave Gibbons and this lot have been mad enough to volunteer for a trip to Earth-Dave to discuss some ethical dilemmas that can occur in the comic book industry and see how they'd handle them.

So what kind of dilemmas might they be considering? Well, say you're thinking of self-publishing. Do you go ahead with it, or do you just burn all your money *now* and save time? If you want to break into a major company, do you have to fake a British accent? And is it really OK to download comics from the net on Demonoid... as long as they're not your own?

Hmm - usually at this point, I mention specific scenarios we've done in previous years, but we've done so many now, it's just safe to say that if it's been in the news in comics, we've done it: crossovers, controversies with creators, editors, retailers, the press, the alleged unfair treatment of gays in comics. And of course, John Byrne. But only when he's said something daft. So in eight years, we've only mentioned him 472 times.

Now, 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. Nothing said herein is to be taken as a contract... especially if it's said by someone from Marvel.

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

OK - so to the panel. As with every year, we asked the best of the best to appear, and as you can see... they were busy, we asked this lot.

Making his debut on the panel is **KURT BUSIEK**. There's *obviously* no favouritism on this panel, but Budgie specifically wanted to mention that he's wanted Kurt on the panel since it started... about five minutes ago. Listing Kurt's credits would take up the full hour we have,

so I think it'd be quicker just to mention the major characters that he hasn't written. OK, I think that's it. Kurt's won two Comics Buyers' Guides Awards for favourite writer, four consecutive *Squiddies* for favourite writer, and was also named their favourite professional creator online poster for five consecutive years.

Also making his first appearance here is **JOCK**. Best known as the artist on *The Losers* written by previous Hypotheticals victim, er, panellist, Andy Diggle, Jock's also drawn *Judge Dredd*, *Lenny Zero* (again with Diggle), *Tor Cyan*, and is about to draw *Green Arrow: Year One*. Like other stars who have adopted a **one word name** for their comics work, it marks him out as a man of distinction and taste. [*Stares at Budgie*] Yeah, well, there's always one exception that proves the rule, eh, Budgie?

JAMIE McKELVIE is another newcomer to the panel. After work appearing in *Four Letter Worlds*, and his graphic novel with Eric Stephenson, *Long Hot Summer* in 2005, Jamie's work reached new heights and a new audience this year in the critically acclaimed *Phonogram*, written by Kieron Gillen. [pause, as if just thinking of this, and pick a group of people towards the front of the audience] Sorry, could I ask you to stand? Yes, you just there. Jamie, just a tip, mate - *That's what people who aren't hot punk girls look like.*

Yet another newcomer is **PATTY JERES**. Previously DC's Director of Sales and Marketing, acting as DC's spokesperson, she's now on the consulting board of Prism Comics, a non-profit organization that supports lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered creators, stories, characters, and readers in the comics industry. No-one's got a bad word to say about Patty, which either makes her an utter saint... or someone who's got blackmail photos of everyone in the industry. I won't say which, but any rumours about me, Budgie and a goat have never been proved.

DAVID BISHOP is the former editor of both *2000AD* and the *Judge Dredd Magazine*, so is a particularly appropriate panellist given 2000AD's 30th Anniversary this year. His history of *2000 AD*, *Thrill Power Overload*, is definitely recommended reading, although I don't think I'm mentioned enough. Hmph. In recent years, David's written successful novels of *Doctor Who*, *Judge Dredd* and *Nikolai Dante*, as well as *The Phantom*, which has won awards for the "Best Phantom story of the year" for Egmont on several occasions. Known for someone with firm opinions about the industry, he's a more than welcome addition.

Returning for a second year is **JON BROWNE** of *They Walk Among Us* comic shop. Last year, when introducing him, we mentioned that the shop was established as a mail order company, back in 1987, thereby predating Image, as opposed to the rest of the panel who predated style and taste. Of course, we excluded Jon from that description. We're delighted that he's returned this year... so that we can correct that error.

And then there's Budgie. Yes, well... Hmm. Lee "BUDGIE" Barnett's written stories for *Trailer Park Of Terror* and *X-Men Unlimited* and a comedy super-hero novel entitled *You'll Never Believe A Man Can Fly*, though he retains his day job as a Financial Director. Somehow. Budgie devised the panel and wrote the hypotheticals. And the alleged jokes. Budgie's responsible for why Hypotheticals has been said to be to Bristol what Florence was to the Renaissance...& Zebedee was to the Industrial Revolution.

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 quite the same as on the Earth you're used to: on Earth-Dave, the internet actually *does* break in half when someone predicts it, the news media treats comics with respect and Greg Land swipes from Sonic The Hedgehog rather than Debbie Does Dallas: 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. There's no major competition. And that sound you just heard was the Joe Quesada weeping in frustration for opportunities lost...

Anyway, the year is 2007... the date May 13th. So let's start...

Jamie McKelvie - awww, look at the look of sheer panic on his face, folks. [*Trust me, Dave, it'll be there.*] It's rather touching, actually. Anyway, Jamie, you're pencilling from a script which states that "the character is walking in a park through a crowd of a dozen or so people". The make-up of the crowd... no, we're back to talking about hot punk girls again, aren't we? OK, let's say the *composition* of the crowd isn't stated. How would you break them down in terms of age, gender, race, etc.?

Jock - Welcome to the panel. Same question to you - if it's not stated in the script, and it takes place, say, in a fairly cosmopolitan city, what would you consider when deciding the demographics of the crowd? Or isn't it something that's crucial, if they're never going to be shown again?

Kurt Busiek - Welcome to *hypotheticals*; does knowing who the artist is - and how experienced they are - play a role in how detailed a panel description has to be?

Back to **Jock**: you've received a panel description from your writer... and there's simply no way that you can draw what the writer's asked for. What do you do? Who do you speak to, the editor, or the writer?

In fact, it's not just the panel; it's two pages in the middle of the story that you know don't work; the script just won't tell the story you know that's there to be told. What kind of things can do that? Panel placement? The panels are too busy? What?

David Bishop - Hello, David. You're the editor on this book. Isn't it your job to catch this kind of thing when approving the script?

Anyway, **David**, you agree - after a second look - that the story is missing something at that point, but you don't think it's that serious and the writer thinks it's fine as it is. Who would you be more likely to ask to change their position: Jock, the artist... or Kurt the writer?

Anyway, the problem's solved and the book ships on time so... no, hold it a minute. It's a comic book, so it's late, of course. Tch, what was I thinking?

Jon Browne - Welcome back. Bet you're glad you said yes, aren't you? Well, let's see what we can do to change that. You're expecting *Battle Lord #100* to arrive this week; it's the culmination of a year-long storyline and issue #99 left readers desperate to know what happens in this issue; you've got orders for it, and... yeah, you can see this coming. It's delayed. Your immediate reaction?

OK, well, being delayed shouldn't come as a huge surprise, since the past six issues have all been delayed and resolicited, several times in some cases. What's that done to your orders for the issue?

Patty Jeres. Hello Patty. You're working for Wonder Comics in marketing and you liaise with comics shops constantly; you've been getting angry calls from retailers about *Battle Lord*, haven't you? What have you been telling them?

Jon - does what Patty's telling you make your situation any better?

David - You knew things were getting problematic with the title because of one of the creators, Charlie Phone-it-in, the well known artist and convenient stereotype. His work's arriving consistently late. It's good work, but the pages are arriving later and later. What would you do to try and alleviate the situation?

Budgie - You don't get a welcome. But then you're used to that. After all, you're Head of Finance of Wonder Comics. You're not popular. But you *have* noticed, as have others, that Charlie's not the only one delivering late comics; there's a cash flow effect as some major comics are being delivered to the shops late. What would you be doing to alleviate cash flow problems?

Jamie - you know the reason Charlie's work is appearing at the offices later and later; he's discovered the internet, hasn't he? He's been participating in an online message board. A lot. **Jamie**, does the immediacy of communication online make it more tempting to respond to comments about your work?

David, you discover this when a rumour message board reports that you've told ol' Charlie to stop posting when he should be drawing. The responses on *that* board are fairly equally split between those who say that it's worth waiting for the book so that they can get Charlie's art, and those who say you should just get another artist.

What's involved in getting a fill-in artist for a special issue; after all this is #100, what would be the 50th issue of Charlie's run.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (yeah, why not?) *Just curious, folks - if you're faced with this situation, would you rather wait for a book and have the same creative team on it, even if you have to wait months between each issue, or do you just want the story told, no matter who they get to fill-in? Put your hands up if you'd rather wait, no matter how long, for the issue. Sorry - put your hands up IN THE AIR (I know my audience).*

At the same time as this is happening, there's an accusation of swiping. It would be so convenient if it was Charlie who was accused of it, but it's not - it's the writer of the book.

Kurt - you've been accused of lifting the year-long plot for *Battle Lord* from a science fiction novel published in the 60s. As a writer, is there something different between the accusation of an art-swipe or a story-swipe?

Anyway, **David**, you decide to drop Charlie from the book, from both stories: the main one, and a short backup which was to be drawn by him but in a parody of the art style prevalent forty years ago.

The artists you ask to take over on that issue are... well, tell us; what would go into the decision of who to replace him with? Is it simply who's available at the time, or would you be looking for artists with a style not too dissimilar from Charlie's?

The two artists chosen are **Jock** and **Jamie**. Gosh, what a coincidence. How do you feel about the offer, guys? Any sympathy for Charlie?

It then transpires that the real reason for Charlie's lateness was nothing to do with the Internet, but was in fact due to personal problems. Does that change anyone's mind on whether or not Charlie should be dropped?

OK, moving on...

Kurt - you're working on another book, *Flagman*. The civilian identity of the hero has just moved into a new apartment and so, you need a landlord. Back to the demographics question from earlier; what would you be considering when deciding to introduce the character in terms of gender, age, race, religious affiliation?

As luck, and a hypotheticals scenario, would have it, you make the character black, a Muslim, and female.... But you write her as someone who doesn't take her religion all that seriously.

Jamie - You're the artist on the book. How much research would you be doing in representing the appearance of the character's religion, or would you be leaving that to the writer?

David - The reaction to the introduction of the character is massive. Some like her, some don't. But fairly quickly, the book starts receiving letters, some complaining that the depiction of the character's religion - what there is of it - isn't accurate, some taking you to task for having a Muslim in the book at all. What's your reaction?

However, those letters... heh, **letters**. Remember them? Sorry, those **emails** and online columns are balanced by those people supporting her introduction.

Jon - if a character in a book, any book, was close to the demographic of your customers, would you promote the book to those customers?

The complaints become more vocal, especially since Kurt kills the character off, permanently. (*You know, it's only in comics that I have to add that qualifier!*) ; the hero's arch-enemy discovers where the hero lives and kills the new character. Alas poor secondary character; we hardly knew you.

Now why'd you go and do something like that, Kurt?

Jon - A death of a controversial cast member? Any noticeable effect on sales? Would your customers believe the character was permanently gone? Or would they be waiting for their 'resurrection' and reappearance.

David - Suppose the character being killed wasn't a newish character (strange, I know - the character didn't *look* newish). As the editor of the book, what would Kurt have to do to convince you to allow him to kill off, say, a supporting character who'd been around for years?

Patty - Back to Kurt's wilful killing of the new character, a black, female Muslim. You're being swamped with interview requests, including from representatives from pressure groups complaining about the depiction of minorities in the comics industry. You should be pleased, right? Any publicity is good publicity, right?

Budgie - there's a campaign online to boycott the company's books. Are you worried?

David - With the internet being as open to content as it is, and new columns starting every other day, does online criticism of your books matter? How widely can a campaign for or against help or hurt a book?

Jock, you couldn't care less about this - you're far more worried about something else that's been going on. While taking a look at eBay this morning, checking to see how much that issue of BATTLE LORD #100 is going for... you see a sketch you did at a con last week up on eBay. As it happens, you remember doing this sketch. It was for a young boy and although you usually charge a nominal sum for full body sketches, you gave this detailed fully inked sketch to the boy for nothing.

And now it's on eBay for £150.

How'd you feel about this?

After a bit of investigation, it turns out that the father of the little boy has made a decent few pounds doing this, getting his cute son to get sketches and then flogging them on eBay. How could anyone be so rapacious, so unethical, so calculating, so... So what do you have to say for yourself... **BUDGIE????**

Kurt - would you be tempted to start putting scripts on eBay?

DAVE - **Do you think that...** Hold it a minute, I don't think I can ask myself a question. It'd just get too confusing. Here - [go to the audience, pick someone and get them to read the question...] "Is there a danger that when an artist stops doing sketches to promote themselves and starts doing it to make money, he's treating it as a job rather than doing it for the fans?"

Go on then - answer that one. ☺

OK, **MOVING ON!!!**

Kurt, you're also writing **Scramble**, a definite second-string character in the Wonder Comics stable. The character's been around for some years, but many of the current cast of supporting characters were created under work-for-hire by a previous writer.

Would you consider that you owe any 'loyalty' to the previous creator to safeguard 'his' creations? You write a story wherein you reveal that one character had a drug habit as a teenager, but has been 'clean' since then. The original creator of the character excoriates you in an interview, stating point blank that 'his' character would never have taken drugs.

How do you react?

OK, now four years ago when we did this panel, on Earth-Dave, America was at war with a middle eastern country called, I think, **Tie-Rack**. Well, it's four years later, two years after

Earth-Dave's President Shrub announced "Done and Dusted". But on Earth-Dave at least, the war's still going on. Now *Flagman* has always been shown to be very patriotic and has been a soldier in his time. But *Scramble* has been shown to be a pacifist through most of his career.

Kurt - You're very much ambivalent about the war, and you write a series of stories in which *Flagman* supports 'our boys', while you write *Scramble* very much against the war. Would you have a problem writing both sides of the argument in different books? And have you any right to use the books to put your own personal views across?

Jock - would you have a problem drawing a war book showing deaths when soldiers are actually dieing overseas?

How about you, **Jamie**?

David - Fifty years ago it would have been inconceivable that Wonder Comics would have published a book that didn't back American and British forces in action. What about now?

Would Wonder Comics have a problem publishing a book that was anti-*this-war*? Does the company have any obligation to support the armed forces in action? Or do you let your writers write what they want to? Would 'balance' be something you'd care about?

Patty - would you be expecting some kind of bad publicity if either *Flagman* or *Scramble* made a statement in the book that actually flew against public opinion?

Budgie - Knowing what has happened to celebrities in other forms of entertainment, would you be concerned of the possible financial effect to the company of not being seen to **overtly** back the troops in print?

Jon - would the readership in your shop give a damn about the position taken by the characters? Would regular readers of the book continue buying?

Well, I think that's about it. Assuming that Budgie and I aren't retconned out of existence by Mark Waid, Greg Rucka et al in the next minute or so, we've just got time enough to thank **Kurt Busiek, Jock, Jamie McKelvie, Patty Jeres, David Bishop, and Jon Browne** for taking part.

The script was all Budgie's fault. As were all the insults, snide comments and gags that didn't work.

And of course, thanks to all of you for attending.

Thank you once again for flying Earth-Dave. Please leave your sexual partners in an upright position. We now return you to your normal Earth.

Thank you... and good afternoon.