

# Hub Magazine

SCIENCE FICTION HORROR FANTASY

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## CONTENTS:

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**FICTION:** *Aesthetic Appreciation on Asperex* by Eric Brown

**REVIEW:** *The Kings of Eternity*

**FEATURE:** *Interview: Jeph Loeb*  
*Interview: Mark Waid*  
*Interview: Daniel Sharman*

## EDITORIAL:

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**by alasdair stuart**

### Potential Energy

*'...a quick but rather too ephemeral read and it struggled to attain the potential that the early print issues promised'*

That's a direct quote from our entry on the SF Encyclopedia. You can find the whole entry here:

[http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/hub\\_magazine](http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/hub_magazine)

It makes for interesting reading coming back from a year's hiatus in which Lee and Phil's careers have massively taken off and mine has massively changed gears, with me giving up writing fiction altogether. The last couple of years have been rough on all of us, horrific at times, and my work has been the thing that's suffered over and over again. I've been trying, and failing, to fit myself into a space I'm no longer sure I ever wanted to fit into, let alone be capable of. It was making me miserable, I was nowhere good enough at it and my run of personal bad luck in the field has enough decent beats to make the sort of comedy John Cleese starred in in the 1980s. I hate those comedies.

So, I stepped away from fiction. I write non fiction now, nothing else and it's freeing, and more fun, and lonely at times. I've lost count of the amount of close friends who have book deals. Likewise, the amount of Twitter feeds full of people's excited and deserved discussions of their success make me feel like an unwanted guest at the party.

Like I'm a quick, ephemeral presence.

Like I'm struggling to attain my potential.

No more.

Hub has to change because with me going through a period of personal growth and Lee gradually taking full control of global genre fiction, whilst Phil is busy graphic designing and appearing in ever increasing

amounts of TV, the magazine can't come back like it was before. It has to come back better and stronger. It's time to attain some of that potential and with that in mind I'd like you to read and respond to the survey in the back of the issue. Tell us what you want, and we'll see how we can fit it into our plans for the future.

Which brings us back to that quote and the fact that I don't for a second think it speaks to the quality of the fiction, but rather the quality of the organization. We've always had *Potential*, had plans like you wouldn't believe and life has never handed us a break, not once, for three years. The simple truth is we have potential banked and we're finally, finally getting around to using it. So stick with us, please? It'll be a fun journey.

# FICTION

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## *Aesthetic Appreciation on Asperex*

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by eric brown

I was four when the aliens came.

They arrived in a silver ship. We watched it land in the desert and squat there, silent and menacing. As hours elapsed and nothing happened, we gained confidence and moved ever closer, until there were thousands of us surrounding the otherworldly vessel.

\* \* \*

I would have been five that day, but for an unfortunate accident. I was exploring a sinkhole in the desert, a deep well that had never before been plumbed, when my organ of Aesthetic Appreciation slipped and fell to its death while admiring a particularly striking rock formation.

My Tactile and Locomotive organ dutifully made its way down the sinkhole and retrieved the corpse. I trudged homeward, bearing my dead organ, and on the way encountered a citizen who challenged me. I would have fought, but, incomplete, was compelled sadly to stand down.

Once home I broke the news to my mate, who offered the temporary services of its Aesthetic Appreciation organ. Though flattered, I could not accede to what I considered (somewhat prudishly, perhaps) a perversion.

I contacted the Completion Bureau and made a formal request for the introduction of a new organ of Aesthetic Appreciation. The citizen in charge informed me that I might have to wait a month for my request to be processed, and then a month again until the appropriate organ was located.

I tried to watch holo-vis, but even my favourite show, *Soaring with Suss in the Stratosphere*, failed to evoke any sense of wonder. We left the burrow and strolled through the desert, all nine of us (how sad that sounds!), and watched rock-hoppers mating in the twilight. The activity would have normally left me replete with wonder at the beauty of our homeworld, but that night it moved me not at all.

"Perhaps two months without Az..." (Az was the pet name for my late organ of Aesthetic Appreciation) said my Cognitive and Computative organ. "How will we manage?"

"Life will be reduced for the period," said my Gustative and Digestive organ, and suggested a consoling feast of sand-snakes when we returned to our burrow.

Duly I watched my Gustative and Digestive organ consume fifteen live and writhing sand-snakes, then we linked and Gus (as it was known affectionately) digested the snakes and passed on the nutrients. The death of Az made even the appreciation of the meal somewhat jejune.

"I know!" declared my Sexual and Reproductive organ. "We should initiate congress with mate. That might assuage our loss."

So I called my mate and suggested congress, and we linked, the nine of us, and our Sexual and Reproductive organs slobbered and sucked and wrestled each other. But though my mate could not withhold its obvious delirium, I was unmoved. I feigned elation, but feared my mate had seen through

my duplicity.

In a bid to distract me, my mate suggested a hunt. I assented, and we left the burrow and watched, with some mild amusement, as our Tactile and Locomotive organs ran down and ripped apart several sand-burrowers.

The following day, the aliens arrived.

\* \* \*

The day passed with not the slightest movement from the silver vessel.

"To think," said my mate as we stood before the ship, "that there are others in the universe like us, intelligent beings come to test us!"

But while I could appreciate on an intellectual level the import of the aliens' arrival, any visceral appreciation was sadly absent.

Towards sunset a hatch opened in the side of the ship and a being emerged, but even then I felt only a stirring of mild curiosity. The creature was bizarre, to say the least: it was merely tripartite, with each organ oddly resembling the other.

The being spoke, though only later, our scientists having studied computers within the ship, were the words made public. "We come," said one of the being's as yet unidentified organs, "from planet Earth..."

The organ fell silent as our clan leader approached. I must admit that I felt, then, a surge of passion as I watched our representative – five proud, strong, linked organs – take a stance of confrontation. Its organs addressed the alien in concert, "We welcome you to Asperex," and it made the appropriate invitatory gestures.

The alien must have had extraordinary translation equipment, for duly one of its organs moved away from the ship and approached our leader, in the established mode of confictory acceptance. (I assumed they had been studying our cultural mores for some time).

On the ship's ramp, the two remaining organs were communicating with each other, (though the content of their speech has become evident only recently). "They look like lobsters, but the ugliest lobsters I've ever seen. And... what's it doing? My God! It looks like it's pulling itself apart. Each section has eyes and... Oh, Jesus! Martin – run!"

But the organ that had accepted our leader's invitation to fight merely stood there, as if frozen, and collapsed upon the onslaught of our leader's Tactile and Locomotive organ.

The remaining organs turned and retreated within the ship – and duly we took the invitation to follow up our leader's victory. Verily these creatures were ill-equipped in the field of inter-species conflict! We swarmed *en masse* aboard the vessel, located the remaining aliens and rendered them limb from limb, in the accepted fashion.

Tales are still told, all these years later, of the time we had aboard the alien ship.

The vessel stands, somewhat weathered and rusted these days, out there in the desert – a monument to our glorious first meeting with beings from another world.

And my tale has an even happier ending. Some three months after the events I have described, the Completion Bureau contacted me with the happy news that a prospective Aesthetic Appreciation organ had been found.

We were united at an official ceremony three days later – and oh! the world then seemed a wonderful place!

We made a pilgrimage, all ten of us, across the desert to the alien ship. We completed the customary circuit, while my Cognitive and Computative organ narrated the events of that wondrous day – and the latest addition to my self, my adopted organ of Aesthetic Appreciation, allowed me to take in the true sublimity of first contact.

And I wept.



# REVIEWS

## The Kings of Eternity

reviewed by jared shurin



by Eric Brown

Solaris

rrp £7.99

*The Kings of Eternity*, by Eric Brown, is a tale of divisions. The primary, narrative division is between the years 1935 and 1999. In the former, a pair of writers is summoned from London to help an editor friend out with "strange lights in the woods". In the latter, a reclusive author on a remote Greek island decides whether or not to open himself up to making a new friend.

Of course, there's also everything in-between.

In 1935, one of the writers is Jonathan Langham. He's got a vaguely-promising career in front of him, a vaguely-satisfying relationship with an actress and a vague sense of purpose that's somehow wrapped up with his dying father. His actress relationship takes a turn for the worse (oh, *actresses!*) so when his slightly-bonkers editor calls and asks him out the country, Jonathan jumps at the chance. He needs a break and the run of the brandy bottle - the chance of a mystery is an unasked-for bonus.

And, flaky as the editor is, there is indeed a mystery in Hopton Wood. Every eight days there's a strange sort of light show in the woods. As Jonathan and his friends trek out (slightly boozily) for a viewing, they take in far more than they expected. The light show seems to show other worlds - and if it can show them, maybe they can reach them as well...

In 1999, Daniel Langham, grandson of Jonathan, is a famous novelist. His piles of money help fund his isolated lifestyle on the island of Kallithéa. He works to a very strict routine - writing in the morning, eating his meals at the same cafe every day and sipping a beer whilst watching the stars at night. Occasionally he's disturbed by tabloid journalists, but he's always able to run them off. At the start of the book, his routine is disturbed. He has a new neighbor - an artist named Caroline Platt - and, against his better wishes, he's drawn to her. He also has a new admirer - a porcine English stalker with a little too much insight into his life.

At this point, I'm going to insert another division into the mix. *The Kings of Eternity* is a very difficult book to review without spoilers and I'm afraid both my praise and my concerns of are both tied up in the twists that are unveiled through the first three-quarters of the book. If you don't mind spoilers - or have read the book - press on. If not, I can only give you an airy "this is a very interesting book" brush off, and you should go away now. Scoot.

Ok? Only spoiler-happy people still around? Good.

As the two divisions in the narrative both unspool, the story grows - oddly - much simpler. Daniel Langham and Jonathan Langham are the same man. The portal in the woods vomits forth an alien gun battle and the three young literati wind up as accidental accomplices to an interstellar freedom fighter. One of the men - Jasper - winds up joining their alien friend in the war against the reptiloid oppressors. The other three, including Jonathan, stay behind, slightly baffled by the whole encounter.

This bafflement soon turns to wonder - Jasper contacts his Earthbound friends from a universe far, far away and - much to their delight, sends them the secret of immortality. They each have a dose for themselves and a dose for the loved-one-of-their choosing. (Actresses need not apply.)

So that, in a nutshell, is why Charles-once-Jonathan is such a recluse. He's afraid of alien assassins and even

more scared that he'll be found out, and his comfortable little life will fall apart.

What Eric Brown does so very, very well is divide the narrative further. While Jonathan and the left-behinds are on Earth, trying to figure out what to do with themselves for... well... eternity, they're occasionally getting dispatches from Jasper: postcards from the front. Mr. Brown makes the brave sort of narrative decision that I've grown to expect from China Miéville - *he follows the wrong guy*. The objective is very ambitious - to make Jonathan's immortal ennui is more of a conflict than Jasper's space-battles with the serpent-kings of Alpha Centauri. There are, for lovers of laser pistols, a few token pieces of action on Earth, but not much, and they're used almost entirely as means to push the plot along.

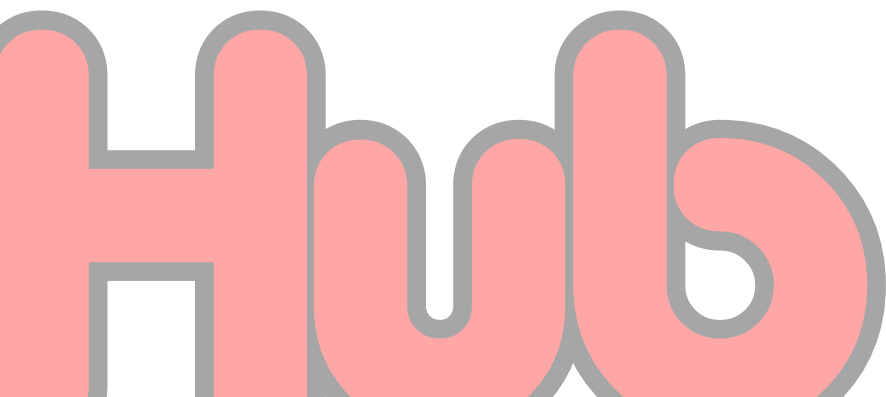
Unfortunately, there's just not enough space in *The Kings of Eternity*. Given the amount of doorstep sandwiches littering the genre aisles, here's a book that actually could've used another hundred pages. By the time Jonathan has encountered aliens, received immortality and revealed himself as (eventually-going-to-be) Charles, the bulk of the book is already over. Jonathan travels through the decades in an increasingly desultory fashion. He meets with his friends, withdraws into his work, meets with his friends again, travels a bit and eventually plonks himself down as "Charles".

As he ages (or doesn't), he has fewer and fewer meaningful encounters with the rest of the world. In fact, with the exception of the other "Kings of Eternity", the only connection he makes is with a young drug-abuser named Sam. She is deliberately crafted as a sort of object - she's as detached from the world as Jonathan is, but in a completely different way. He doesn't connect with her as a person, but his mounting loneliness starts to trick him into believing that "saving her" with immortality will save him as well. When this plan falls apart, he withdraws entirely - not even making a friend until Caroline shows up in 1999. *The Kings of Eternity* sets up as if it is going to really dive into the impact of immortality on the psyche of the everyman, but then, disappointingly, never indulges itself.

The relationship between Jonathan and Caroline is the other part of the story that gets short shrift. Jonathan/Charles has to overcome his isolationist instincts to connect with anyone, no matter how impersonally. He has to trust Caroline. He then has to fall in love with her. He *then* has to decide whether or not she's going to become his "immortal" love. And even that isn't his final decision (I'll leave some secrets). This is a lot to ask of anyone. Mr. Brown spends a great deal of time on the first two hurdles - meeting her and learning to trust her. The final two steps occur simultaneously and are almost taken for granted. As a reader, I had been *told* that Jonathan/Charles had fallen in love, but I didn't know enough about Caroline to do the same myself. Given the stakes, I wound up holding my breath at the end.

*The Kings of Eternity* is all too brief. It is a thoughtful, provocative book that sets up a more meaningful story than it actually tells. It accomplishes a great deal, but only by eliding some of the most meaningful parts. This is a book that should cause a great deal of thought and discussion amongst all who read it - and that alone is enough to recommend it.

**A version of the review first appeared on [Pornokitsch.com](http://Pornokitsch.com)**



# FEATURES

## Interview: Jeph Loeb

with richard whittaker



When it comes to blurring the lines between comics and TV, Jeph Loeb may be the most important figure in the business today. He became a fan favorite for his work with artist Tim Sale on the gangster-heavy *Batman: The Long Halloween* and its sequel, *Batman: Dark Victory*. Before that he made 80s popcorn movie nirvana, making Michael J. Fox howl like a *Teen Wolf* and letting Arnold Schwarzenegger carry an arsenal into battle as a *Commando*. Those two halves of his career merged with a three year run penning *Smallville* before he and Sale moved over to Tim Krieg's *Heroes*. In between he has kept up his career as a comics writer, signing an exclusive deal with Marvel Comics in 2005 that saw him pen the blood-drenched *Ultimatum* and the tragic *Fallen Son: The Death of Captain America*. In 2010, Marvel pulled off a major coup by hiring him as executive vice president of their television division and the first real fruit of that union is the new *Ultimate Spider-Man*, which recently aired in the US.

**Hub Magazine: The animated *Ultimate Spider-Man* is a big evolution for Marvel's television division, and it's hard to not see the fingerprints of Paul Dini [*Batman: The Animated Adventures*, *Justice League Unlimited*] all over it. But he is so heavily associated with DC's shows – how did you lure him away from the Distinguished Competition?**

Jeph Loeb: Getting Paul Dini was one of the first things we set out to do. When I came over I wanted to make sure that the shows had the pedigree of the shows that I grew up loving. So when you really see the big shifts in the way that boys' action adventures have been shown, there's a high water mark in *Batman: The Animated Adventures*. We didn't just do that. Eric Radomski, who was one of the key people producing that show and giving that show the look and feel that it has is, is someone that I brought over and he's the head of production for Marvel Animation. So it really was, for the three of us, like getting the team back together. Eric and I had worked on the short-lived but much-loved *Buffy Animated*. We really wanted someone that had a strong voice, that had an understanding of the characters, and when I first contacted Paul who I knew, I just sort of left it out there. "I know that you're a Marvel Comic's fan, is there any way we can get you over to work on our side?" The odd thing about it was that it was literally just the right time. He was looking for something that would get him excited, and *Ultimate Spider-Man* is just the beginning. Paul's working on another project for us. It's very exciting.

**HM: How is the new influx of talent affecting season two of *Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*?**

JL: When I came on *Earth's Mightiest Heroes*, it had already been in production, so to a certain extent that show will continue in the vein that people have been loving. I can tell you that as it gets more towards the latter half of the season that's where I stepped in and at that point we brought in [writer] Chris Yost to be more involved again and at that point we brought [creative collective] The Man of Action [*Ben 10*, *Generator Rex*] in. I think you really see that last dozen or so episodes, it's not a shift, it's just more of the same. We wanted to focus on more single stories. One of the things about that show is that it's very serialized, and one of the things I said is that, y'know, I really want people to be able to enjoy the show as a one-off experience. That's the only change you'll see, because it's still a beautifully made show.

**HM: Chris Yost is one of the most underrated creative forces out there.**

JL: When I first came on board, I looked at the first season and I thought, the real heart and soul of this show is Chris and we need him on it. He's extraordinarily talented.

**HM: Speaking of Chris, he did some really pivotal work on the animated *X-Men: Evolution* including co-**



**creating X-23 – the first character to jump from the animated show to comic continuity. So what are the current plans, if any, for any more animated X-Men, especially *Wolverine and the X-Men*?**

JL: I can't really address that, but what I can tell you is that, while those characters are characters we are very interested in looking at, in terms of more *Wolverine and the X-Men* there's no plans for that right now.

**HM: The Ultimate line has been a major part of Marvel Comics for many years, and has gone to some pretty dark places ...**

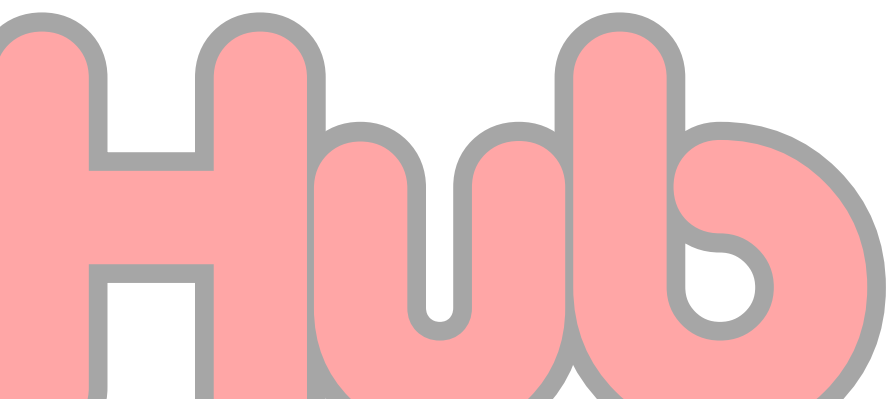
JL: And I've taken it there.

**HM: ... So how do you balance that with something like the animated *Ultimate Spider-Man*, which is aimed at a younger audience?**

JL: We actually set out to do something that was family friendly, but that really felt like Spider-Man. I think it's something of a misnomer to say that the Ultimate universe was created as something that was meant to be a more realistic universe. What it was created to be was relevant to its time. When [writer] Brian Michael Bendis sat down originally with [Marvel's Chief Creative Officer] Joe Quesada and, at the time, Bill Jemas and Dan Buckley, when those people were talking about what the Ultimate Universe ought to be, what it was was how could you reinvent or retell the story of Spider-Man present today. Maybe it wasn't to do with a radioactive spider. Maybe it was to do with DNA or genetics or that kind of thing. It was that world they wanted to take a look at, to see if you're going to reinvent or reboot or just take another look at it. What's hard to remember is that the Ultimates comic line is now ten years old, and in that time we've seen an extraordinary change in terms of our story telling, the kinds of things that happen. Ten years ago, we were talking about *Batman* animated. Ten years later, we're talking about *Ultimate Spider-Man* animated. Again, what we're hoping to do is to show people exactly what is going on in the world of what used to be called Saturday morning kids' television and is now really animated versions of our stories. So what we did is that we say down and we say, 'What makes this now? What makes this part of the Marvel Universe?'

One of the things that really makes a difference is that, when you look at the big scope of the Marvel Universe and that has to include the cinematic universe, when you look at how all those movies are leading to *The Avengers* which opens on May 4, is how big a role Nick Fury plays in that and how big a role S.H.I.E.L.D. plays in how the superhero world works. So that, when we first sat down that was one of the first things that we looked at. OK, if we accept that the Marvel experience includes Nick and includes S.H.I.E.L.D. and includes that world, let's bring that into Peter's life.

I really had to give credit to Joe Quesada because he's the one who looked at us and said, 'How many shows are we going to start with Peter getting bitten by the radioactive spider, and then learning how to be Spider-Man, and then meeting MJ, and all those kinds of tropes?' Those are terrific things, and they are all part of the Spider-Man experience, but what he challenged us with was, what's it like a year later? What's Peter's life now he's been Spider-Man for a year? And what's happened is that Nick Fury comes along and gives him this opportunity. It's part of a challenge, and we're going to see how he reacts to it, to be trained by S.H.I.E.L.D., to be part of a program for young heroes, to be the next Captain America, to be the next Iron Man. For us that's a very exciting idea.





Many people fear the title, but Mark Waid is proud of the fact that he's a freelance writer. Not too surprising, since that job description has placed him at the helm of some of the biggest titles in comicdom. After a brief stint as an editor for DC comics, in the late 1980s he moved over to writing and so began a stellar career that has seen him write just about every major title for both DC and Marvel. He has also written some subversive anti-hero comics, starting with *Kingdom Come* with artist Alex Ross in which he portrayed a dark future for Batman and his allies. In recent years he created his own inversion of the hero trope with *Irredeemable* for Boom! Studios and its sequel series *Incorruptible*. However, he has remained loyal to the two-fisted, four-colour realm, recently reinventing the angst-driven Matt Murdoch as the freewheeling Man Without Fear for his Eisner-nominated run on *Daredevil*. Now he has been announced by IDW as the scribe for the new incarnation of *The Rocketeer*, the jet-powered retro hero. However, with *Captain America* dominating box offices last summer and his return to the screen this summer as part of *The Avengers*, Waid's multiple runs writing the Sentinel of Liberty have been flying off the shelves. In a frank discussion about the state of the industry, Waid talked about why Captain America can be more critical of the American Dream than Superman can be, the value of indie web comics, and why comic stores must adapt or die.

**Hub Magazine: You had your run on *Captain America* in the 90s and then returned for 2011's extremely well-regarded *Man Out of Time*. How did you take on the character change between those runs?**

Mark Waid: Having to write Captain America in a post-9-/11 world is much more difficult because our reputation across the world has changed so radically in some places. That's part of the reason the *Man Out of Time* miniseries appealed so much to me, because it was a chance to do Cap in the early stages of his awakening and not have to concentrate too much on a post-9/11 world. As a matter of fact, I wrote it specifically with the idea that Cap woke before 9/11, because it's much more interesting to me for Captain America to awaken in a time when we didn't have a specific enemy in our sights, like we did with the Nazis.

**HM: There have also been some major plotlines, like his trip to Guantanamo in the Marvel Knights imprint, and Ed Brubaker's run. Does that affect how you approach the character?**

MW: You have to keep an eye on that without worrying too much about it. If you had to worry about stepping on the toes of every Captain America story ever told, you'd be paralyzed. But fortunately the fabric of America has changed so much over time and the things that we as readers are aware of and are concerned about in the political tapestry change all the time. That helps, because it becomes less about 'Has Captain America fought this bad guy before?' The advantage you have is that you can ask, OK, how would Captain America feel about the politicizing of the debt ceiling process, how would he feel about the electoral process in the last two elections, and how would he feel about having a black man elected president, given that he was born in the 1920s? New questions about Captain America arise every time you open the newspaper.

**HM: So what has made Captain America such a durable character?**

MW: The basics of his origin are very captivating to young comics readers because the idea you can be a scrawny little kid with a heart as big as the United States, with a real passion against evil, and yet be a 98 pound weakling, I think that describes a huge number of young comics fans. The beauty of Captain America is that he didn't have to come from a distant planet like Superman or he didn't have to be born into a family of billionaires like Bruce Wayne. He just happened to be in the right place at the right time and someone happened to give him a magic potion and he grew muscles and became a super hero. That's almost as good as Captain Marvel just having to say Shazam! It's about the same level of ease.

**HM: Whereas Captain Britain has just about the most philosophically complicated origin of time.**



MW: First you have to drive your car off a cliff, so that's a non-starter. But, yeah, I think that's a big part of [Captain America's] appeal. And I think the costume design is brilliant, because it hasn't been substantially altered for the last 70 years. It works well in comics, it's vibrant, and everybody wants that shield. Everyone's picked up a trash can lid at one point in their life or another, and everyone knows what a Frisbee is.

**HM: And Cap is very much part of a propaganda tradition - The very first thing you see him doing is punching Hitler. Steve Rogers has obviously evolved beyond that. So what's the appeal of writing him now?**

MW: Cap is supposed to represent the American Dream, but I have no idea what the American dream is these days, except to pass the Debt Ceiling. Is it to own your own home? Is it to own your own business? Is it to be self-sufficient? I'm not entirely sure, and I don't think most people have a good handle on what the American dream is these days. As our country has diversified over the last 70 years, the clear cut idea of what the American Dream was has broadened. And that's what makes Captain America interesting as a character. He makes you ask yourself those questions as a writer. What do we want as a nation? What do we mean as a nation? What is our role in the world, and what are our strengths and weaknesses as a country? That, to me, when I was writing Cap, was the appeal: Really using him as a fulcrum, as a magnifying glass with which we can examine our own sense of patriotism.

**HM: You've also had your high-profile runs on Superman. Both are iconic characters caught up with American identity but, weirdly, even though Superman is only American by adoption, Cap is more questioning of what being American means.**

MW: They would never dare do that with Superman. He's been such a corporate icon for such a long time and I know from personal experience that you just don't. The message from Warner Brothers is that Superman is not a vehicle to make statements, which is absurd because he was created as a liberal crusader, as a two-fisted social activist. But again, it's like any corporate symbol. The corporation's interests are much more vital to them than any social statement. At some point like Superman or Batman become no more viable in that arena than Mickey Mouse or the Stay-Puff Marshmallow Man. They're just pictures.

**HM: Talking of iconic character, now you're working on Daredevil. Matt Murdoch has really been put through the ringer over the last few years, so how do you bring him back from all that?**

MW: How you pull him back from that is have him wake up and realize that the path he's been on for such a long time, the path of misery and the path of self-flagellation. Matt is the most self-destructive, brooding hero in the Marvel universe, and a sane man just wakes up one morning and realizes, 'This is getting me nowhere. All the decisions I have made in the last 15 years have made my life worse, so I'm just gonna start doing it different.' I had a line in the first issue where he just kept digging a hole and every time he thought he hit bottom, God would find him a new shovel. You just wake up one morning and think, 'I just can't live like this anymore.'

**HM: By contrast, you've obviously made some good decisions, because you've had a career that would make most people jealous. So how did you break into the industry, and how have you stayed there?**

MW: I seem to have lucked into a good long run of comics. Even after 20-odd years of doing this, I have that freelancer fear of 'Oh my go, if I say no to this, then they'll never call back.' I think that's probably untrue at this point, but it's a guy feeling. How I broke in at the time, and how you break in today are completely different answers, but I think that's great. Back then, it was matter of that there were only a couple of publishing houses you could work for, DC and Marvel, and a couple of other smaller ones, and the odds were highly stacked against you. In my case, I was highly persistent and I worked on some of the titles that no-one was interested in at the time, like breaking in on Superman when no-one wanted to write Superman stories. But today it's the web. The web has democratized the entire process. We encourage people to start up their own web comics because, other than time and energy spent, there's no financial risk. It's not like printing your own comics and hoping they will sell. It's just 'Put your comics work on the web and if it's good then we will find it.' I know that a lot of publishers, especially mid-level publishers, are constantly looking at web comics because that's where they'll find the next breakout artist.

**HM: That's part of how Matt Frank got his gig on IDW's *Godzilla* [see Hub 139], through putting his work on DeviantArt.**

MW: I'm thrilled beyond belief that, when I was asked two years ago at a convention 'How do you break into comics' that the answer I had given rote for 20 years was no longer valid, and the new answer is 'Get your stuff on the web.' In terms of longevity, I don't have the slightest clue. I feel like Wile E. Coyote, walking off the cliff. If I look down, then I'll fall, so I just keep going. I think if it's anything it's that I love these characters as much as I did when I was eight years old, and the joy of getting inside their skin and working out who they are and what they mean, I do my level best to get that across on paper every time I sit in front of the keyboard. Maybe that's the X-factor, I don't know.

**HM: You've also had your time in an editorial position at Boom! Studios, so why go back to writing instead?**

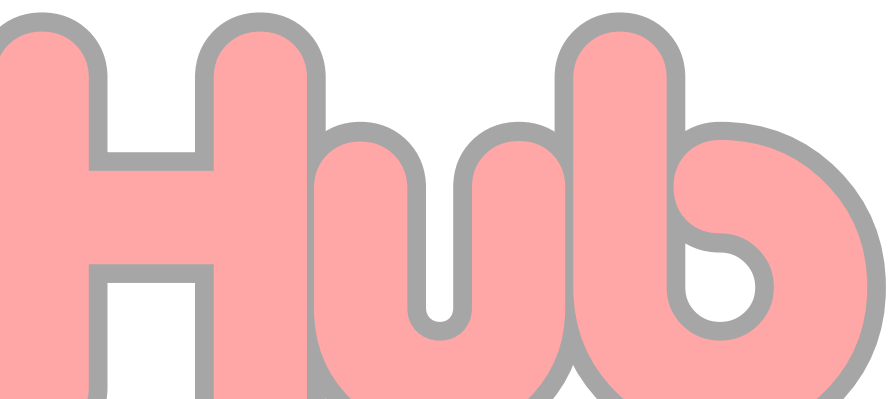
MW: I think it's because I'm a good editor but I'm not a great manager. It's a completely different skill set, especially in the case of Boom. When I joined the company, it was equally invested in original properties and original concepts as it was in spin-off books and media tie-ins like *Planet of the Apes* and *Clive Barker's Hellraiser*. But after a few years, because the market place was changing all around us, and we had to adapt as a company, I looked around and realized that the only books we were doing as original properties were the ones I was writing anyway. There is no joy for me as an editor in editing a licensed property book because I'm not the final say as to what's good and what's not. The people who own the property are, so I'm just a midwife. It's a very dissatisfying job for me. There's just no level of creative input, so at that point it made sense to me to go back to the freelance live.

**HM: So what's next for you?**

MW: The big creative push for me is to launch as much original content online as I can, and help define or redefine the web comic's model in a way that makes sense in some creative and monetary sense. It's a tough road because at this point it's not a terribly lucrative place to be, but I'm not in it for the money. I'm in it for the idea that this clearly the way the industry is headed and I'd rather be in the forefront than in the caboose.

**HM: The change is already happening. For example, a lot of people who travel regularly used to have a ritual of going to the comic store in a new town. Now they just preload whole runs of a title on their iPad. So it's a question of how publishers and comic shops adapt to that.**

MW: That's the big question, and nobody's quite sure. Personally I think that stores are going to have to find ways to morph into less revolving around periodical sales and revolving more around pop culture artifacts, revolving around trade paperbacks, revolving around the merchandise. Just as the Hallmark Stores don't make the bulk of their money selling cheap greetings cards any more. Instead they make the bulk of their money selling statues and chotchies and such, and I think comic shops are heading that way. I may be wrong, and I salute comics store owners who have held out this long, but we saw what happened to Blockbuster and we saw what happened to Tower Records and we saw what happened to Borders Books. We only have 2,300 comic stores services by the distributors, and that's not just the United States. I believe that's 2,300 spread out across Canada and England and Australia as well. If you live between Jackson, Mississippi and Memphis, Tennessee, there's no place you can buy a comic book, and that's where digital takes us back to a mass market for the first time in 40 years.



## Interview: Daniel Sharman

with richard whittaker



Love it or hate it, *Immortals* – director Tarsem Singh's 3D take on ancient Greek mythology - was one of the most visually alluring and stunning movies of 2011, and has now come to DVD and Blu-Ray. But when the visuals are so strong, where do the actors fit in? As the man beneath Ares' helmet, former Royal Shakespeare Company player Daniel Sharman trod the boards alongside Edward Fox in *The Winslow Boy* before heading the US for the short-lived cat-powered TV oddity *The Nine Lives of Chloe King*. Recently cast as Isaac in season two of MTV's surprisingly dark *Teen Wolf* reboot, Sharman talked to Hub just before the US release of *Immortals* about his divine duties on-set, the divide between Tarsem's Heaven and Earth, and how he went from spear carrier #4 to god of war.

**Hub Magazine: Tarsem has been described as part Caravaggio, part animator. From an actor's point of view, what is it like to work with someone who is so profoundly visually driven?**

Daniel Sharman: If you've seen any of his earlier work, he is almost like a painter. He has an incredible visual sense of composition. I paint as well, and my mother is an artist, so I've always thought in those kind of images. He's always thinking like that, always putting images together and getting the most effective line. As an actor you always trust that, it may take you half an hour longer, it may take two hours longer, but you know those two hours are worth it because what will be on the screen will look phenomenal. Your job is done for you, and you never have to worry about, 'How it is represented? Will it come across?' If he says 'that's a wrap', you know that's fully what he envisioned. He never lets that go, he never goes, 'That's fine, we'll leave that.' I love that, as he's fantastically visual, but he's also one of these people that just allows you to go off and act, which is nice. He'll say, 'We've got that, but if you want to do it again, do it as many times as you want.' So you know that he's on your side, and once you're in that place you can riff and play with it, and do what you want with it.

**HM: You always have to wonder about any director who is that visually-minded. Like the old joke about George Lucas' only direction being, 'Like that, but more.'**

DS: [Tarsem]'s very like that, it's very much 'More!' and 'Again! Again!' You feel his passion, and every morning he'd be in there, just this ball of energy. If you're doing fight scenes and it's six in the morning, he's just, 'Daniel, do it again! Do it again!' and it's incredibly empowering and invigorating. It's nice to work with, really.

**HM: How did he explain his grand vision for the film?**

DS: We went in a very detailed way through the set. He had it all planned months beforehand, working with Eiko [Ishioka, costume designer]. These sets were all built, and every actor, he walked us all through - what it was going to do, where we were going to be, what it meant - so you really got a sense of the things he wanted to do, the very classical Greek things he wanted to put in there and the twists and the deviations he wanted to do. There was no evolution - that was it. I walked in and saw my home, and who cares if it's painted today, that's it. So you walked into that world, and once you've inhabited it and spent enough time in heaven, you can start envisioning it and seeing how it all fits together.

**HM: He catches something pivotal about Greek mythology: A, that the gods are ubiquitous and B, they're a total pain in the ass.**

DS: And hugely flawed, especially Ares. When I read the script, I loved that he's the hot-headed youth, a boy with Zeus as this all-powerful, all-encompassing father. Ares is the teenage rebel, and that's a nice thing, to have these flawed characters. You never feel there's any safety in the story, because at any minute someone could make a mistake.

**HM: The gods are, in many ways, like mortals but more so. How did Tarsem go about making them different?**

**DS:** The difference is in the palette. You get this effect with all of our costumes and the colors he used with them. In heaven, it's just this incredible world, but then you go to Earth and there's this different set of colors and a different mood to it all. It's funny, because one of the sets was on one lot and the other was another, and you walk through Earth and it's grimy and dark, and then you walk into heaven and it's pristine. It's that stark, which makes it good when the gods come down to that world because they're so out of place.

**HM: The traditional boring question: How much prep work did you have to do for the action sequences?**

**DS:** I got the part, and then I was up there a month before shooting, just doing fight training and working out and costume and details and doing this and doing that. You had a full month of actors working out in cold Montreal, coming out of winter, all in this studio. It was a nice, weird experience, working out with stunt guys, who are all huge, and you're with all the other gods, so there was a camaraderie. Almost like being in a play, almost like you're on tour and everyone's working together.

**HM: And Ares will always be in the middle of the fight.**

**DS:** He's not going to be sitting on his arse. He's always going to be where the action is. Tarsem sat me down after I got the part, and I said, 'Look, I don't particularly look like the archetypal god of war. What's going on here?' He said, 'I want to be one of those character where, although he's not built, he can do some damage in that kind of wiry, young, extremely taut way.' I thought that was extremely interesting, that he chose something that I always thought was more dangerous, those people who exist with that inner wiring that's always about to snap. There are a lot of people who don't know about him who'll say that doesn't look like a god of war, but who is to say what that looks like, or how effective that is?

**HM: If you look at classical warriors, they're not a six foot eight soldiers with broadswords. It's all javelins and short swords.**

**DS:** And there has to be a degree of intelligence to the character. To have the big brute who traditionally hasn't been as smart is kind of silly. This guy's got to think through everything, to strategize.

**HM: He's the god of war, not the god of bar room brawls.**

**DS:** Exactly.

**HM: It's a heavy hitter cast too, with actors like Henry Cavill (Theseus) and Mickey Rourke (King Hyperion).**

**DS:** And John Hurt. To see him from *The Elephant Man* onwards, I'd always admired his work, and to see him in Montreal, I got to speak with him and go to dinner with him. He's just got these fantastic stories about being actor, you can't help but learn. Or I'd go down and watch what Mickey or John did and it's just phenomenal.

**HM: Mickey seems to just be a force of nature.**

**DS:** Absolutely. I can't describe to you, he's just wonderful. But you put him on a set and he's just electrifying and just so watchable.

**HM: I have to ask you about the helmet. When I saw David Mack's sketch of it [for the *Immortals* graphic novel], I thought he was being very stylized, but the spikes are really that big.**

**DS:** I remember when they told me about it. I walked up there, having it fitted and put together, but I didn't see it fully put together until a couple of days before shooting. Then you arrive and you see it painted this incredible gold and you put it on and it looks beautiful. Then you realize you have to do all your stunts in it. The worst part of it is trying not to kill anyone with it.

**HM: Kill them, or break it?**

**DS:** I think killing someone would be less of a problem.

**HM: You kill someone and it's an insurance issue. You break it, and it's a continuity problem.**

DS: We had two made. One of them had to go through a heavy set of scenes, and I managed to break that one pretty quickly. The other one is intact, and I'd like to keep it. I'd don't know if I'd get it back through customs as hand luggage.

**HM: How much did it weigh?**

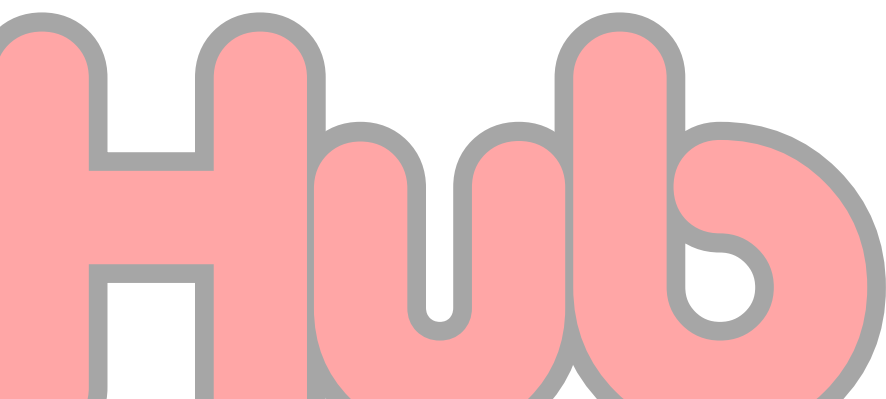
DS: It was heavy, about ten, fifteen pounds, and on a long day of shooting, of trying to hit your marks, and the worst thing was that the cape kept getting caught in the back of it.

**HM: You've also done *The Collection*, which is the sequel to *The Collector*. That was one of those great mansion trap movies that never really got the distribution it deserved.**

DS: I've got a love for those kinds of movies. It was a passion thing. I just wanted to do it, and even though I wasn't in it for very long it was something I wanted to tick off the list, one of those very tense horror moments. The director [Marcus Dunstan] was very accommodating and he fitted in between my *Immortals* shoot. I was flying between Montreal and London, and I stopped in for a few days and just had such a good time.

**HM: A good horror film is a great place for an actor to really stretch his wings.**

DS: Absolutely. I grew up doing stage, and the screen is a completely different kettle of fish. You have to put in your time and experiment and do all those things before you can be any good. Certainly as a stage actor you do the small parts first. You play spear carrier number three and then you work your way up and you're captain spear carrier, and eventually you've learned from it. This is one of those things where I could just do it and play around, and that's incredibly appealing to me as an actor.





# SURVEY

**give us some feedback...**



Here's a simple survey that we'd like you, our dear readers, to fill in and get back to us. It'll certainly help us shape things in the future...

- What would you like to see more of in Hub?
- What would you like to see less of?
- What sort of regularity would you like Hub to come out on? Weekly with less, or six weekly with more?
- What format works best for you? (PDF/ePub/kindle)
- Are we covering genres that interest you?
- What genres would you like to see us cover that at present we don't?
- We rely on sponsorship and donations to pay our authors and cover our costs. Would you be prepared to back a Hub powered Kickstarter to enable us to break free of this model?

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