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No cricket strips here! An interview with Dez Skinn

Phillip Vaughan, University of Dundee

Dez Skinn is a highly experienced and outspoken editor, publisher and writer, whose career spans five decades. Skinn is a key figure in the development of the British comics industry in the 1970s and 1980s. He started his career at IPC Magazines, starting as a sub-editor, and working mainly on IPC's humour titles such as *Cor!!*, *Whizzer & Chips* and *Buster*. After Dez left IPC, he went onto work exclusively for Marvel UK, where amongst other things, he created *Doctor Who Weekly*. After his stint at Marvel, Dez set up Quality Communications, who went onto publish the seminal British anthology comic, *Warrior* (Quality Communications 1982). This black and white monthly featured early work from future superstar creators such as Alan Moore, Alan Davis, Steve Dillon, David Lloyd and Steve Parkhouse. The comic is probably best known as the original home of *V for Vendetta* (in its original black and white version) and Alan Moore's update and meta-reinvention of *Marvelman*.

In this interview conducted in the summer of 2017, Dez reflects on his early career, and gives us an insight into the development of *Warrior*, and the other publications he was involved in over his career.

Phillip Vaughan: *Let's start by talking about your time at IPC Magazines. What was the studio set up like back then?*

Dez Skinn: IPC was a monster. It really was. A Frankenstein monster made up of parts from Fleetway, Odhams, Hulton, Amalgamated Press, Mirror Group Newspapers and so on. With these companies merged, not only did it become the

entire world's largest commercial publisher (the US Government was the actual largest, but hardly commercial), but IPC also acquired several 'in-house' printers. In the 1950s lots of printers had kept their presses busy by becoming publishers, so it wasn't unusual for publishers to have this cost effective department.

But that's where the Frankenstein aspect comes in. These printers were ugly and cumbersome. You'd have Odhams Watford and Fleetway Gravesend getting priority on printing any new titles. *Now Woman* magazine, at the time one of the top three UK sellers, could justify using Odhams' beautiful gravure presses, something comics hadn't seen since the 1950s heydays of *The Eagle*. But comics, with their mere 250,000–300,000 print runs, weren't worthy. So they got the blotchiness of even then outdated letterpress printing, on the worst newsprint stock imaginable. Every now and then, when these presses were at full capacity any new launches would be put out to outside printers, who by then were using litho presses, so titles like Starlord were cleaner, brighter and far more attractive. But the second that Gravesend had space on their creaky old presses, titles would jump across to them and everybody would have to put up with awful printing.

Interestingly, US comics had themselves a similar problem. With the exception of Derby Connecticut-based Charlton, who had their own local presses, all the publishers went to the only US printer offering the old four colo(u)r letterpress printing, World Color of Sparta, Illinois. When their presses finally crumbled, Canada's Quebecor offered a more modern litho alternative, with a wider range of brighter colours on better paper. But at such a price hike that US comics stopped being disposable ephemera as their cover prices doubled and tripled in only a few short years and virtually disappeared off US newsstands.

But getting back to IPC, with its old school middle management, the comics division was decidedly traditional, desperately wanting to get back to its old story paper glory days. It didn't or couldn't evolve. Frustrated new blood, coming in as I did in 1970, found it hidebound and Canute-like in its self-belief. You were pigeon-holed, you did your job and were never to ask questions of others. I asked why house ads for annuals were lacking appropriate artwork, why images were pulled from the covers rather than something drawn to suit. When I suggested we – editorial – could do it better, I was quickly told it had its own department. When I heard from the licensing side (I was mates with one of their people) that an annual about to be cancelled was Syndication International's top overseas seller, I was told that was a different department and overseas sales weren't factored into a title's viability.

It was also 100 per cent unionized. SOGAT, SLADE and the NUJ covering admin, art and editorial. So there were no performance inducements, no rewards for doing well. Just arrive on time, leave on time, keep your head down and you've a job for life. Whatever you do, don't come up with anything new, because if it fails, they'll be able to justify making you redundant. Stagnation. So, in a sea of over 2000 IPC journalists, the driven souls – those wanting to rock the boat with change and evolution – quit. They left to work for more flexible smaller companies. Those wanting a steady life were the ones who stayed.

New launches were part of the programme, but any new titles weren't really new. Even their project titles reflected this. Buster 2, Valiant 2... that's what they called them (so Scottish rivals DC Thomson didn't get any advance knowledge of what they were doing next). If Scorcher was selling well – and titles were cancelled if they fell below a quarter of a million sales a week! – the replacement for an ailing title would be a carbon copy of Scorcher.

You could argue that would only divide the Scorchers readership, but they wouldn't listen. They had this catchy Hatch, Match, Dispatch philosophy. A successful title would hatch a remarkably similar offspring. Weak sellers would be matched with similar but stronger selling titles and the two would be matched into Lion and Thunder or Buster and Jet. Absurdly this actually worked, for a while...

The federated news trade, those wholesalers and retailers whose job it was to actually get publisher's little gems out to the public, didn't realize that there was a finite number of customers buying comics. That maybe, readers – the richer ones – of one title were already buying a similar title. So Jag readers maybe also bought its parent title, Tiger. Oh, no. They seriously thought that when the two were merged, their sales would also combine, virtually doubling. So Tiger and Jag, with obligatory free gifts in the first three issues, would get massive trade orders. And of course, the bigger the display the bigger the sales. It's a frustration of publishing that it isn't how good your idea is, it's how much the trade believe in you. If they don't order many, you can't sell many. And knowing as much about comics as they do about caged and aviary birds, their quality assessment of potential profit would be based on the free gifts and individual sales history of Tiger and Jag.

It was this kind of skewed logic that, with the exception of the heartache and wars behind almost every page of every early issue of *2000 AD*, led to increasingly bland and outdated product going round in ever-decreasing formulaic circles.

So is there any wonder that, like the Frankenstein Monster, IPC was finally destroyed?

But for me, the final blow was when I did stick my head above the parapet...

I was sub-editor of Buster at the time (each title had four dedicated staff: the editor and sub-editor, the art editor and art assistant). One of my jobs, as it had been

on Whizzer & Chips and Cor!! in the past was to keep a bar chart of the 24 or so strips popularity. And so I was very aware that whether humour or adventure, the horror strips nearly always took the top spots, Rent-A-Ghost, Maxwell Hawke, Freddie Fang the Werewolf Cub, Faceache, Hire A Horror, et al.

Comics at the time were like variety shows with their equivalents of a singer, a comedian, a ventriloquist and a magician being a war strip, a sports strip, a kid gang strip and the like. The unspoken rule was that you didn't make editor level until you passed 30. But rather than wait the best part of a decade until all my enthusiasm would have been knocked out of me by assistant managing editors more concerned about balloon tails coming to a sharp point than actual content being worth reading, I took the plunge.

I suggested a themed weekly instead of the prevalent something-for-everybody approach with its bits of everything leading to skip pages (I mean does a sci-fi fan Really want to read a cricket strip?). I proposed Chiller as a gags and adventure mix title, homing in on the ever-popular horror genre. With its corporate 'replicate rather than innovate' mentality, management approved the idea [...] but as an annual with the title The Buster Book Of Spooky Stories.

That was it. As soon as I was offered something better (and editing Mad certainly was that!), I quit!

As an aside, I'd become the IPC NUJ FoC by this stage (in full that's the International Publishing Corporation's National Union of Journalists Father of Chapel). You have to do something to be noticed in a sea of competition! So when I handed in my resignation, I was able to do so directly to the editorial director. His response? 'I'd have thought you'd leave years ago'.

[Figure 1: Eagle print quality comparison.] © The Dan Dare Corporation Limited.

PV: Jumping ahead a little, can you talk a little about the creation of Starburst? Did you think it would still be running all these years later?

DS: In the first issue, as a sign off to my editorial, I made the foolhardy boast ‘to stay with us. We intend to be around for a l-o-n-g time!’. Usually the kiss of death such a proclamation, but damn me, forty years later it’s now the world’s longest-running magazine of cult entertainment. That’s staying power!

For the prior few years I’d been editing *House of Hammer*, a magazine focused on that powerhouse of horror films (and one which I’d initially intended to title... Chiller. Yorkshiremen don’t like throwing anything away!). I’d hoped we’d live off the publicity of new Hammer horror films, having exclusive access to just about everything. But my timing had been terrible. In issue two we previewed *To the Devil – A Daughter* (Sykes 1976), Hammer’s final horror film. Somehow we limped on without them but I was determined that my next idea would link to a rising star rather than a fading one. As it happens I’d always been as big a fan of science fiction as I was of horror, in comics, TV and films. So when I read in *Variety* that in the *States Star Wars* had outgrossed *Jaws* in its first weekend, knowing there as a six month lead time to its UK release, I jumped at the opportunity to create a companion title to *House of Hammer*, focusing on sci-fi across the media. I put the idea to my bosses and was amazed they weren’t interested. I cheekily asked if they minded if I published it myself and they said ‘provided you don’t do it in work hours’. So suddenly I became a fully fledged publisher!

Trade orders were for 72,000 copies – that’s more than we were doing on *MAD* and *House of Hammer* combined – so I was in seventh heaven.

Not that my ‘indie publisher’ badge lasted very long because three issues in I was head-hunted by Stan Lee to takeover his ailing British Marvel company. When I

turned him down, saying I could hardly desert my Starburst audience for his, he bought the title off me so I could continue with both!

PV: You worked on some major titles at Marvel UK. I am interested in the relationship between Marvel UK and its US counterpart. How did this work on a day-to-day basis?

DS: It didn't. Stan and the financial gnomes of New York left me to it. I'd initially produced a report on how Marvel could turn around its UK publishing which was dying on its feet. They'd reprinted the very best, then the rest of the best and with the weekly UK schedules eating up the US monthly material at a terrific rate they were down to the rest of the rest. Stan and his publisher boss Jim Galton obviously liked what I'd suggested because they asked me to implement it all as head of their UK operation.

Our only day-to-day interaction with the States (after I fired the US team who'd been editorially producing the British weeklies, including Stan's brother Larry!) was in asking for proofs of material that we could make work in the standard British format, something they'd been oblivious to when they'd been doing it.

PV: Can you tell us about the launch of Doctor Who Weekly? This is another title that has had longevity [...] what do you think set this title apart?

DS: Longevity? I'd say. I won a Guinness World Record for starting this one, 'the world's longest-running TV tie-in magazine'. And the funny thing is they have to keep giving me a certificate each year because it's kinda tough for anybody to steal that record!

What set it apart though? I'd say two factors. First, it had a weekly TV audience of over eight million when I launched it. That's crucial. You can spend a fortune promoting your oh-so-clever new idea so people will know it exists from

week one. Or you can ride the coat-tails of a proven success. Of course it didn't hurt that I had Tom Baker on tap, the TV's fourth Doctor, to tour the country with me, bigging up the launch.

The second thing is its dedicated fan base. Back then the only way you'd discover anything outside of the current week's episode would be through reruns and paperback spin-offs. Even videos hadn't been invented, let alone the Internet. So *Doctor Who* fans bought it in droves. The fact that some of them remembered Patrick Troughton or Jon Pertwee didn't matter. We were running archive photos and features between our comic strips (nice inexpensive content which offset the cost of original artwork) that every fan wanted. In fact, I think it was running that archive which I believe kept the magazine alive during those wilderness years when it wasn't on TV.

I've always believed that comics deserved more than a kids-only audience. But it's all about how you package them. With *House of Hammer*, where we retold old Hammer horror films in comics, it was a magazine. It had a painted cover and lots of feature material between the comic strips. It didn't look like a kids comic and amazingly none of the horror film fans criticized me for the comics content. In fact, that was what made it unique [...] it's USP was that it included comics in a film magazine. Similarly with *Doctor Who Weekly*, the comics strips were an integral part of the formula, even though it was a TV title.

PV: You then set up Quality Communications around 1982. What led you to create your own publishing company?

DS: The funny thing is that Stan Lee had told me he felt my greatest strength was in coming up with new ideas, and that I shouldn't get bogged down producing them month in month out. That I should find a team, help them settle in, smooth any rough patches then move on to something new. So I did!

Once I'd stabilized Marvel UK (as I rebranded the British Marvel reprint house) and had added a raft of new titles, Hulk Comic, monthly pocket books, summer specials and the like, I felt my job was done so I moved on.

PV: I really want to focus on Warrior. What was the inspiration for this anthology comic?

DS: At Marvel UK, I'd used the profits from reprint titles to create new material. But it was all company owned. So when I left I thought it would be great to do the same thing again, but with us owning the ideas. So the writers and artists weren't working just for that issue's cheque, but were creating things they'd get royalties from. From merchandising, from overseas syndication [...] from areas they'd never had a piece of. Of course as publisher I also recognized the fact that if you own something yourself you do far better work than if it's just for a one-off flat fee. In fact the old way actively discourages creating new ideas. You'd get no more money for the first Judge Dredd strip than for the one hundredth. That means you have all the grief and heartache of figuring out how it looks and how it works for the same amount of money somebody else would get producing an episode ten years later.

So with *Warrior*, I blatantly took all our best ideas from Marvel UK and cunningly disguised them as non-copyright infringing new concepts. Captain Britain became Marvelman, Night-Raven became V for Vendetta, Conan became Father Shandor Demon Stalker, *Doctor Who Weekly's* Abslom Daak: Dalek Slayer became Axel Pressbutton, the psychotic cyborg, and so on.

[Figure 2: *Warrior Issue 1.*] © Quality Communications

PV: Why did you initially go with Marvelman as the lead strip and what was the genesis of this 'reimaging' of this 1950's comic?

DS: I knew I wanted a token superhero in the anthology. While the content was a variety show mix, traditional in British comics, it was a fantasy mix [...] no cricket strips here! So the mix reflected horror, sci-fi, fantasy and superhero. A minority audience, superheroes, they're a unique US concept because they've killed off all their legends and had to create new ones. But if it was only one out of six strips, I didn't think we'd lose any readers by having a guy in spandex.

It would have been easy enough to create a new character but I actually owed a huge debt of gratitude to a comics veteran of the 1950s, a guy with the unlikely name of Mick Anglo. When I once said that couldn't be his real name he replied, 'no, it's actually Michael Anglo'.

When I first went down to London in search of fame and fortune, Mick had just launched *Super DC*, a monthly reprint of Superman and Batman strips. In an attempt to escape provincial newspapers, he'd been my first port of call. 'I know all about Superman and Batman so I'd be a great help on the comic' was how I sold myself. That the pitch failed didn't matter. He gave me the name of another company and I got my first job in London, at IPC.

So I thought of his 1950s character, Marvelman. The title had ceased in the early 1960s but had been the longest running British superhero character and however many people remembered him, I couldn't get fewer readers by reviving him than creating something new. So I tracked Mick down and struck a deal with him. He wasn't crazy about our approach, but he acknowledged that he'd nothing to lose as he'd given up on the character ages ago and the publisher had long gone out of business.

PV: *Warrior in a sense was ahead of its time, with creator-owned content. What were the pros and cons of this innovation, which is much more prevalent today?*

DS: I guess I was being idealistic. I knew the market and felt I knew how far you could push the boundaries, having worked for several major publishers over the previous decade or more. I didn't like the system where usually creators got no in print credits, where original artwork was retained by the publisher, where no royalties were paid on reprints or foreign sales. So I wanted to change things. I'd always returned artwork and run credits. But I guess with *Warrior* I gave so much control over to the individual creators that I lost control.

The reality was that we were as strong as our weakest link. If just one contributor missed a deadline, there were no 'ghost' versions on standby, so the entire magazine missed its deadline. During its heady three years, I had two artists completely disappear, two teams totally fall out with each other, a writer who wouldn't supply invoices because he believed he wouldn't have to pay tax if he didn't invoice. Oh, countless unexpected disasters that I'd never experienced under the rigidity of the corporate umbrella.

So did the experiment work? Not for the publisher, no. At least not financially. But it did provide a brilliant showcase for creators not shackled by tradition. I proudly used to send copies to pals working in American comics, showing what old Blighty could produce. Ah, vanity. They used it as a takeaway menu, so they could take away people to bolster their own line.

I had an e-mail not long ago from an American, Rick Hirsch, the Director of Marketing at ComicLink. He said

Warrior was the tipping point in comic book history that turned it from a dying industry into the incredibly vibrant world that now rules much of the entertainment landscape. Anyone who enjoys modern comic book sensibilities

or one of the many media properties based on them owes you and your team for shining a light on what could be done. Bravo.

So I guess it did work then.

PV: What did you really think of the continuations of V for Vendetta at DC Comics and Marvelman (re-named Miracleman) at Eclipse?

DS: Eclipse was an utter shambles. Agreements were ignored, royalties buried, porky pies about sales were told to appeal to speculator wholesalers. During that time I think everybody fell out with everybody else. A huge disappointment. If only Pacific hadn't gone out of business just when they were going to publish a US edition.

DC with V: Hidebound, they had to have it in colour. David Lloyd did his best to facilitate them, but its chiaroscuro look didn't really lend itself to colour. But that was a very small compromise for everything that followed...

[Figure 3: V for Vendetta] © DC Comics

PV: Quality began a popular run of American sized reprints of 2000 AD characters; I have read that there were plans to expand this range, what were these plans?

DS: IPC had originally produced US editions themselves, hiring Nick Landau's Titan team to editorially package them. But the problem was the distribution was also controlled from the UK and in a comics boom period, US specialist retailers never had much cash left one they'd paid ever-expanding biggies DC and Marvel. So on paper the figures looked good, but little cash was forthcoming. IPC decided to get a guaranteed though smaller sum by licensing the properties to a third party instead and I had the good fortune to be in the right place at the right time and I had good US connections to handle the business side.

Whether they'd have worked or not, I was gung ho for introducing America to the likes of Dan Dare, the Trigan Empire and many more non-2000 AD classics out of the vast IPC inventory. But the awful production values of Spanish print and colouring that were foisted onto me shattered that dream.

PV: A slightly obscure one here, can you tell me a little about the Scalextric catalogue comic you did with Ian Kennedy in 1983 and Codename Speedmaster?

DS: OK, that was one of the occasions when I decided to work in the real world.

Along with a graphic designer I'd set up a London west end design company named Studio System. This was after Marvel, before *Warrior*. We mainly did work for the film and fashion industries but one day I was contacted by Hornby Hobbies, the Ramsgate-based producers of those brilliant toy lines Hornby Railways and Scalextric racing cars. We pitched to produce their annual catalogues for their train sets and racing car sets. While we didn't get the train one we did get the Scalextric one, because of the pitch. I suggested that instead of it being a simple catalogue of cover to cover ads for their cars, racks and accessories, we modelled it on a US comicbook format. So the ads would be breaks in an adventure story and it would look more like an editorially led magazine. I forget how many million they printed but they went for it... with a tough brief. It had to incorporate every Scalextric car and all the buyable accessories. It had to cash in on the *Star Wars* craze and it had to look like the old *Eagle*, with fully painted artwork.

Now That's what I call a challenge!

I remember travelling all the way up to Cumbria to spend a few days bouncing ideas around with Steve Parkhouse. No idea why I chose him really. Except for my admiration in his abilities, I didn't even know if he could drive!

But somehow it all finally came together: a strip complete with a damsel in distress, a heinous villain (with a meaningless but evil-sounding name, Zadoc Bar) and his joke sidekick (a motorbike riding thickey thug named Angel) and of course a dashing hero, Codename Speedmaster.

The nod to *Star Wars* was the little robot that sat behind our hero in a modified F1 Leyland Williams and gave sat-nav/GPS style directions with optimum speed instructions.

And I managed to fit all the Scalextric paraphernalia in by making the story revolve around a top secret testing ground (named E.X.T.R.I.C.) where a challenge was set to find the ultimate driver of all vehicles, the Speedmaster.

As for the *Eagle* look, I've had the good fortune to be friends with many of the old school artists, the like of Don Lawrence, Ron Embleton, John M Burns and Frank Bellamy. But for me there was one painted artwork producer who I felt could give the strip exactly the dynamism I felt it needed: Ian Kennedy. I'd first worked with Ian on a Buster annual and remembered being incredibly impressed by his style, his strength.

I've always believed you can judge a great commercial artist not by what he puts in, but by what he knows he can leave out. While Barry Windsor-Smith, Jim Lee and a legion of others impress by their fantastic detail, for me the essence of comics is not so much in the finish but the start. Almost anybody could ink the likes of Gene Colan, Jack Kirby, John Buscema or Gil Kane. Their strength was in composition, in dynamism. And boy, were they commercial! They could turn out ten times as many pages a month as the 'feathering brigade'.

Just look back at any of Ian's work and you'll see his strength, his composition. That and those weird heavy red outlines he throws around foreground characters all the time (laughs). With Ian I knew we'd get a lovely finish but more

importantly I felt confident there'd be minimal changes made by Hornby to his pages.

If I remember correctly, there weren't any at all!

[Figure 4: Speedmaster-montage.] © Dez Skinn/Scalextric

PV: *Comics International was an incredibly popular news/trade comics magazine.*

Can you tell us a little about its history, and its ultimate demise?

DS: I've always believed in doing the obvious: find a hole in the existing market and fill it. Don't try to create a whole new market, that way leads madness! Hammer didn't have a magazine [...] give them one. *Doctor Who*, the same. Sci-fi movies, the same, *The Hulk*, the same. And so on.

I remember I'd just moved back to London after a year in Manchester, running a telecommunications company (you just have to get into the real world every now and then!). I wasn't feeling inspired so I applied for jobs, one editing Screen International, the other Time Out guides. Neither panned out but I'd seriously researched listing magazines and trade papers. I'd been out of comics for a few years and didn't have a clue what was going on, where the events were, what titles were still being published (and which ones were any good!). I didn't even know where my nearest comic shop was. Hey, obvious [...] start a comic trade paper cum listing magazine. So I did. It launched at 4000 copies and peaked at 74,000. It worked so well, shops told me it outsold their top actual comic (at the time *The X-Men*).

Despite Stan's 'create it then move on' beliefs, I stuck with this one. 200 ever-evolving issues, some with as many as 144 pages, going from black and white to colour, from newsprint to glossy. But after sixteen years I was getting itchy feet. I was bored. And I knew that if I didn't walk away then, on an anniversary issue, I'd be doing it for the rest of my life. So I passed it on, just as I had with almost all of my

earlier titles. I figured I'd refined it to such a point, it would be simple to continue without me. Clockwork, routine. No need to make changes. It worked.

As for its demise, how it struggled to achieve only eight more erratic issues over the next few years: who can say? Opinions are like arseholes, everybody has one. I'm not the right person to ask.

PV: Coming more up to date, can you tell me about your work in education through entertainment and increasing world levels in illiteracy through comics?

DS: I was honoured to be invited out to the United Arab Emirates a few years ago, to chair a talk for the New York University in Abu Dhabi entitled 'Literacy in the Middle East in the 21st Century'. Why me? Somebody in the know out there had actually seen two of my books about comics.

What a fantastic week that was: A seven day extremely well-paid holiday with my own personal chauffeur and a VIP pass everywhere [...] just for a 90-minute lecture. So I swatted up on stuff, read loads of local papers out there, and slowly a realization dawned on me: why did one of the world's richest countries have the absolute highest unemployment in under-25 year olds? Because They Didn't Have Comics!

Hah! Cracked it.

I was amazed to discover how poorly the arts were being treated in schools over there: virtually nonexistent. Only sciences were being taught. I guess in a newly born society nobody wants their child to grow up to be a musician, author or artist! But the problem with that is that I believe invention is a creative art. Making it work is the science. So without the inspiration the arts provide, you risk stagnation.

However a bigger problem faced the Middle East. Like everywhere else the bulk of the population are the workers. Often immigrants, these are the people who

put together all the ideas, brick by brick. They're the ones whose children are expected to do likewise. So the bulk of the population was getting a pretty raw deal. No expensive schooling because they weren't scientist material. And appalling literacy because there was no escapist entertainment to encourage them to learn how to read [...] No Comics!

It's a sad story, probably true in many parts of the world. The gap between the haves and the have nots is ever-widening, because the haves prefer it that way.

But fortunately there are groups trying to change things. It was one such who invited me to talk about this literacy problem in the UAE. They also invite musicians and actors from around the world to perform concerts and stage shows there. It's a start.

PV: What is next for you?

DS: I'm enjoying life. But then who wouldn't when they live in Brighton? It's like London, but in Technicolor. So I take on projects, helping others shine. Like I always have I guess, but in a less high profile way. It's their baby, I just help wean it. So I'm designing books, getting good print deals for people, doing publicity and promotion on a range of projects from print to film. And I'm adoring not having daily, weekly or monthly deadlines for the first time since 1969.

And, most absurdly, I'm suddenly a vocalist in a band! We're called Warp Spasm, and it's me with four *2000 AD* artists. We did our first set, a 60-minuter at this year's Sci-Fi Weekender. That was different. A punk prog metal band was how one person described us.

But to keep my hand in more directly, I've revived a magazine I last worked on in 1976. I was accosted by somebody in the local post office (no, really) who recognized me and went on and on endlessly about how he adored a title I'd done

back then and demanded I bring it back. Publishing's pretty tough these days when the Internet can get so much material out there so much quicker. So I've been convinced to revive the world's first ever full-colour horror film magazine: *Monster Mag*. It doesn't have any worries about Internet competition because it's a Poster Mag! Hah! Let's see the net try to compete with a three foot by two foot Christopher Lee!

But the magazine's USP (because you always need a unique selling point or it's not worth doing) is that I've picked up exactly where I left off. So the first new issue is cover dated November 1976 and only features films made up to that date: When horror was gothic rather than slash.

I've done six issues so far and it's proving quite a nostalgic hit. Also because I do the whole thing myself except for printing, from picture research to design, colour balancing, writing and editing, I can really enjoy not having to rely on others.

And I guess I'm aiming at producing a book of my fantasy life, which is what it's been, as I'm slowly compiling one. Problem is I've passed 140,000 words and haven't even got into the 1980s yet. If only in one respect, it'll be a biggie!

PV: Thanks for your time Dez!

Contributor details

Phillip Vaughan has taught at the University of Dundee since 2005. He is the Course Director of Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design's MDes in Comics & Graphic Novels and also the MSc in Animation & VFX, plus the creator and Module Leader of the Comic Art & Graphic Novels Undergraduate Expansive Module. He is also the Art Director at Dundee Comics Creative Space and the Scottish Centre for Comics Studies, Editor at UniVerse Publications and Art Editor at DiamondSteel

Comics on the Saltire series of graphic novels. He has worked on high-profile licenses such as *Braveheart*, *Star Trek*, *Deathtrap Dungeon*, *Urban Chaos*, *Tom and Jerry*, *Teletubbies* and *Wallace & Gromit*, subsequently working as a cut-scene producer for *Farscape*, a Jim Henson production. He also worked on *Brave* and the highly successful *State of Emergency* franchise. He also realized a lifelong ambition and worked with the creators of *Judge Dredd* on a video game project for Digital Animations. He recently completed all of the animation and front-end work on *Superman* for DC Comics, and created 'Bantah 6', a strip for David Lloyd's digital comic, *Aces Weekly*.

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