



PANELS ON THE PRAIRIE

Marshall Edwards unmasked: the 31-year-old writer of comic Prairie City Response.

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Superheroes and their stories have risen (up, up, and away) from an underground subculture into mainstream pop culture. When readers open the most recent issue of their favorite hero's caped escapades, the art immediately catches their eyes. But the writing is its own art form.

The Annual sat down with Marshall Edwards, a Midwestern comic book writer, to learn more about the lesser known side of comic books.

WHAT'S YOUR JOB LIKE?

A lot of waiting. A comic book depends on the script to exist, but the execution of the whole thing depends upon the artist. Having an artist work for you generally costs money, and always costs time. There are a lot of things you can do in the "slow season:" self-promote, network, and write new scripts.

When things aren't slow, I work on my scenes. There are a lot of similarities between script writing for comics and script writing for movies. I'm always deciding which visuals and framing will treat a scene the best, and trying to give characters lines that are economic and illustrative of their character.

HOW IS WRITING A COMIC SERIES DIFFERENT THAN WRITING A NOVEL?

My first big fiction project was a big sweeping space opera novel. I wrote about 40,000 words on it during NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) several years back. When the dust cleared, I looked back on what I'd done and hated it.

That's when I went on to create comics and short stories. There are two types of writers, I've learned: "plotters" and "pantsers." "Plotters" plan every beat and plot-point and scene ahead of time, and "pantsers" write with a more improvisational style. I'm definitely a pantser. I love to create characters and situations and let them surprise me. If I can surprise myself and stay invested, it's a good sign that it will hold a reader's interest too.

WHAT IS THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS LIKE BETWEEN YOU AND THE ARTIST?

My philosophy is that when you create, it's in service of the work of art, not in service of yourself. When you write comics, your vision will be inevitably shaped by the artist and their choices. Some of those changes will be blatant - the artist will have a suggestion for how to frame a scene better, or an idea of something to add into the background.

However, most of the decisions your artist makes will not be so blatant. The key is talking about the "soul" of your work with your artist—what the art and narrative influences are, what you want to get across to the reader, and so on. If the artist understands these, they can make novel changes that you didn't know the comic needed.

WHAT'S YOUR WRITING PROCESS LIKE?

Creating strong characters and letting them surprise me is definitely my way. I'm not against planning—I'm just aware that I am going to change a lot of that plan in the process of writing. I'm setting out to create the best story possible, and in doing so, I'm going to leave a lot of old plans behind. It's natural to write in a character-centered way.

YOU'VE WRITTEN AND CREATED A COMIC SERIES CALLED PRAIRIE CITY RESPONSE, WHICH IS ABOUT A MIDWESTERN SUPERHERO TEAM. WHAT WAS THE INSPIRATION BEHIND PCR?

PCR is about a fledgling superhero team in a fictional Midwestern city. Prairie City is the sight of first contact with extraterrestrials some years ago, and Earth's first spaceport was built on its outskirts. Now, there are a large number of alien refugees on earth pushed from their homes by an encroaching galactic empire.

I wanted to speculate on some of the things that might happen if superheroes were a part of our society, much like firemen, or celebrities. The heroes get pushback from the public and the mayor; they compete with private security forces funded by corporations; and they struggle

SPACESHIP image courtesy of Marshall Edwards

