

HELLION FOR HIRE #3: A TALE OF TWO CITIES - 2

by Billy Tucci ; 06-22-2006

[Last week's column](#) focused on the sleepy town of Bayport, (it's actually a "Hamlet" whatever the hell that means), birthplace of iron-man inker Mark McKenna (who's got over 6500 inked pages under his belt) and home/workplace to yours truly.



Today, we're heading off to the opposite end of the spectrum -- the Big Apple and the new Marvel offices, where I'll be meeting with **Heroes for Hire** editor, Mark Paniccia, Assistant Ed , Nate Cosby, and writer, Jimmy Palmiotti. It's a beautiful day, 80 degrees and sunny, so by George, I'm taking the motorcycle. I reset the bike's tripometer gauge to check the distance, don a leather jacket, sunglasses, earplugs, and helmet.

The Long Island Expressway is the quickest way in but, unlike the parkways, the ride really sucks. No trees or twisty turns to lean into and out of, just a straight monotony of concrete and the constant facial beating from the millions of sand grains blasting from what seems like an endless stream of construction trucks.

One hour later the stainless steel and concrete spire of the Empire State building majestically rises from the once-glorious Manhattan skyline. As with every trip I take into the city, I cannot take my eyes off the cavernous whole of Downtown where the World Trade Center once stood and I wish they'd just build those damn towers again they way they stood.

I lived in Manhattan for four years, and another six in Queens, so navigating my way through the gauntlet of fumes and horns is a piece of cake. I have to say that one of my favorite things is riding through the city streets on a motorcycle. But throwing caution to the wind is very tempting. I've been guilty of darting in and out of traffic with abandon and even taking the occasional sidewalk, but that stunt almost killed the legendary (and ancient) Carol Channing..but that's a story probably best left for another time.



Regardless, I make it to 417 5th Avenue in one piece and park. Damn it's hot and what a relief to remove the jacket and helmet. I keep on the shades and earplugs though as a 20 something wanker-bum is yelling to me while peeing on the building. I wonder, "Does this guy look familiar? Is he a disgruntled former Marvel employee, or just a very enthusiastic DC fan?"

The tripometer reads *exactly* 55.0 miles from my house to Marvel, but as you can imagine, what a difference an hour makes. DC fans pissing on the Marvel building, stressed out yuppies on their way to a meeting with the Bobs (the obligatory *Office Space* reference) and tons of women wearing short wispy skirts and high heels - boy oh boy, do I love this city!

Okay where was I - yes. I've got a meeting of my own, thank you very much. After checking and rechecking to make sure I locked up the bike, I head up to the 11th floor reception area for my meeting. Before entering, though, I look up for a moment, as the above sign reads, "No parking"

Feh!

Now what's weird is that I'm nervous as that proverbial knot my stomach returns. I sure don't know why, since I've been friends with many of these people for more than a decade. But the receptionist has no idea who I am and looks at me the same way the one did all those years ago when I was trying break into the industry. Last week I wrote of William, my three-year-old studio intruder, but unlike him, this Crusader feels some reservations about being here.

The knot is somewhat lifted by a cheerful hello from Marvel Editor-in-Chief, Joe Quesada, followed the arrival by Mark and Nate's very cordial intern, Courtney Antonioli. Courtney takes me downstairs one floor to the creative brain center of the House of Ideas.



Marvel is a fanboy's dream - and clean! Toys, posters, artwork and computers cast a colorful cocoon around this quietly controlled chaos of editors, bull-penners and executives busily darting to and fro, all the while finding a moment for a smile and handshake to this Indy invader. The knot is gone.

After taking a few unauthorized detours to look at all this really cool stuff, the very patient Courtney eventually brings me into Mark and Nate's office. I've met Mark twice before and even though we talk and email often, it's a first time I'm face to face with the affable Nate Cosby. Samurai-like, the man shuffles from his notes, to computer screen, to the piles of beautiful **Daughters of the Dragon** artwork and back. "Busy huh?" I brilliantly inquire. We then glance over some of the colored pages to **HFH** and, aside from a few minor changes, they sure look great to me! I think this book is going to be big and the brass seems to be pleased as well. Regardless, I'm not sure the total amount of books that fall under Mark's editorial shield but it

must be at least 20 per month. On top of this workload, he too is the father of a newborn baby. I better be good to him and Nate. They work too damn hard for me not to.



Jimmy shows up a few minutes later and we pull Mark and Nate out for lunch. The elevator stops on the 9th floor and there we see the offices for (get this...) Atari! - How cool is this? I guess I live under a rock because I didn't even know they were still in business!

Anyway, we all end up at some chic' yuppie and fashionista-filled establishment posing as a diner. Eventually seated by some chap who looks like the prissy maitre de' from *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, (that's a lie, it's a chick and she's pretty hot) I apologize to Mark for being slow with the pages, but promise the book will be done in a few weeks. Jimmy asks me which issue I'm talking about and leaves me momentarily flabbergasted. Everyone then laughs, for we all know he's been doing this crap to me since 1994. The boys give me a quick tutorial on how a major publisher produces books. With *Crusade*, I'd be doing cartwheels if I finished penciling a book two months before it's supposed to ship, but with a fine oiled machine like Marvel, it's par for the course. So the knot returns briefly, but subsides when it's decided that Jimmy will handle the breakdowns for issue two so I can jump right on it upon finishing number one.

Since I haven't read the script to **Heroes For Hire #3** yet, I asked about the outcome and, after a quick rundown, am really, *really psyched* as to just how important **HFH** is to **Civil War**. We also discuss future **HFH** issues (I'm contracted for 5 so far) while I keep on pushing more and more for *Tarantula* and *Black Cat*. This of course has nothing to do with the fact that I want to draw them, but that I'm sure readers want more of these ebony-clad lasses.

Long after the food is gone, we continue our meeting and the more I hear, the more excited I am to be a part of the **HFH** team. When all is said and done, Jimmy and Mark head out for a cup of coffee and Nate escorts me back for more hellos and some photos. I interrupt Marvel Publisher, Dan Buckley, in the middle of major meeting with staffer, Jeff Furletti, and managing editor, David Bogart, but they still find time to talk up **HFH** and inquire about my wife's health.



I eventually seek out the posh office of Ultimates editor, Ralph Macchio. Like the man's appearance, his office is impeccable. We're both surprised that it's been almost 10 years since the **Daredevil/Shi** crossover and laugh at what a great time it was to produce it. We plan lunch in the near future, as it would be nice to work together again.



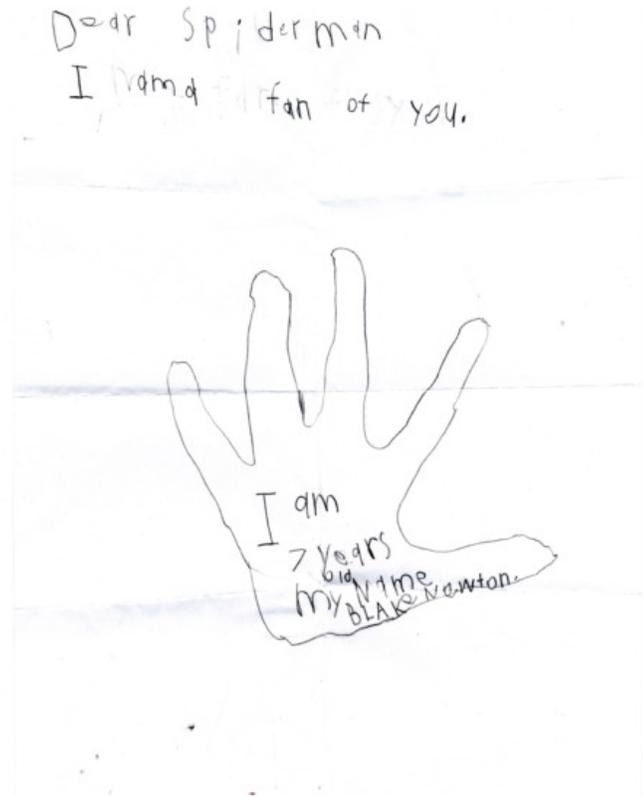
I then pop on over to Joe Q busily working away on his computer. For such an important industry position, Joe's office is very lo-key, and tranquil. Posters and original artwork adorn the walls,

while statues and family photos line his tidy desk. The thing that struck me most, however, is that he's got an art table in there. Imagine that, the editor-in-chief of comics' number one publisher is still, at heart, an artist - and a damn good one at that! No wonder they're doing so well over there.



It's getting late and I must be heading back out to the island and my pages. We all exchange goodbyes, but something on Mark's desk catches my eye. It is a letter. A letter that (to me at least) truly sums up the reason (like or hate the industry at any given time) we all love comic books in general.

The letter is addressed not to Mark Paniccia or Ralph Macchio or even Stan Lee; it's address to "Spiderman." Written by seven-year-old Blake Newton of Louisville, KY it says more than any professional commentary or analysis ever could. A heartfelt hello from someone that still believes in heroes and inadvertently inspires others to do so as well. I know it has inspired me and would I love to meet his parents one day just to say thanks.



I take the parkway home and instead of stinging sand and pebbles, feel the cool ocean breeze upon my face. Cruising along the south shore of Long Island, I keep thinking about my trip to Marvel, this wonderful opportunity, and Blake Newton's . . . and that the \$65.00 parking ticket was worth it the trip. At least till my wife Deborah finds out!

Back to the drawing board and Tally Ho! Billy

See you next week!

About Billy Tucci and Crusade Fine Arts, Ltd.

Billy Tucci is the award-winning creator, writer and publisher of the graphic series Shi. Lion Eyes Entertainment has recently optioned Shi for a major motion picture with actress Zhang Ziyi is attached to star. An award winning filmmaker in his own right, he's currently writing the screenplay with Kevin Bernhardt. June 2006 will see the debut of a new Shi Convention sketchbook and the 576 page "Definitive Shi" while Billy makes his penciling debut for Marvel with August's "Heroes For Hire" (written by Justin Gray and Jimmy Palmiotti). He's also the creator and writer of Narwain Publishing's "Zombie-sama!" and invites you all to join his message forum on www.williamtucci.com

Discussion thread: <http://forum.newsarama.com/showthread.php?t=74621>

TonyBedard

06-22-2006 12:19 PM

Billy!

I tried calling you back on that number you left me -- no dice. I tried emailing you at williamtucci.com. Nada.

Why, oh, why don't you love me anymore???

Tony Bedard

PS- nice touch with the Carol Channing photo!

Book of GOB

06-22-2006 12:45 PM

I'm really loving this inside look you are giving us, Billy. Thanks!

AlexLothos

06-22-2006 12:50 PM

Very nice trip inside! Thanks for sharing!

Gladiator X

06-22-2006 12:52 PM

That letter from little Blake made me all misty eyed.

That's what it's all about man.

Billy Tucci

06-22-2006 12:58 PM

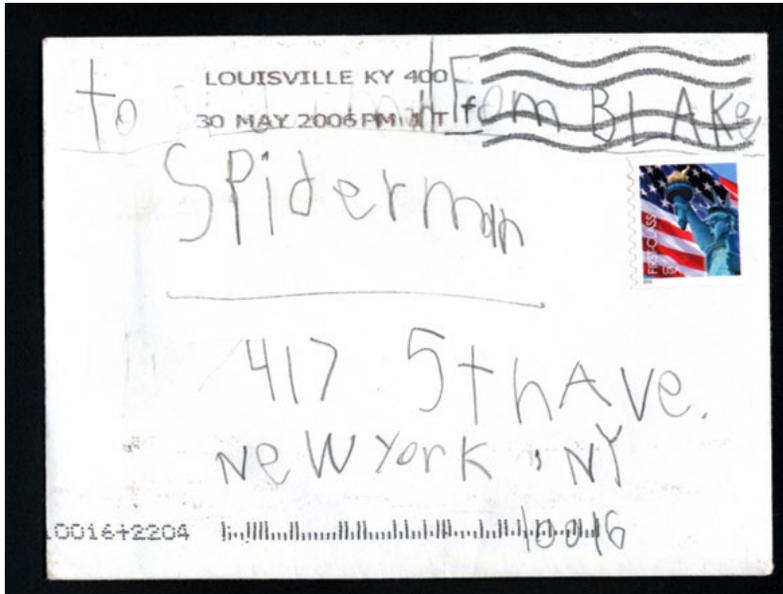
The Best Letter

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Gladiator X**
That letter from little Blake made me all misty eyed.

That's what it's all about man.

I concur! Here's the best part -- the envelope.



Tony, I don't know what the problem is, but I'll call you later!

RDuarte

06-22-2006 01:05 PM

Christ. I don't know if I'm getting old, or if I'm just in touch with my "feminine side," but when I read the letter from Blake, I actually started to cry. I think I'm going to go buy some comics and give them to little kids.

DreamKing

06-22-2006 02:08 PM

Joe Quesada uses a Mac? Rubbish! ;) :D

Great column, Mr. Tucci. I'll be checking out Heroes for Hire.

jamdav86

06-22-2006 02:16 PM

BTW, Infogrammes bought the name rights to Atari, so the offices you saw weren't of the original Atari.

Still cool though.

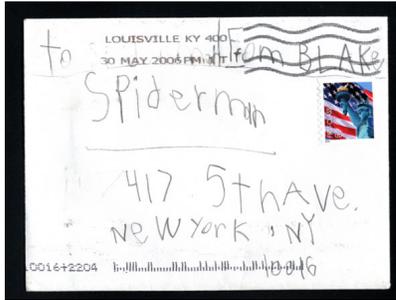
Gladiator X

06-22-2006 02:23 PM

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Billy Tucci**

I concur! Here's the best part -- the envelope.



Sweet.Thanks for sharing that.

I just picture the little guy sittin' there writin' that out to his hero and it just makes me all happy.

I'm glad that there are still little kids out there that these characters are heroes to. I'm also very happy that he has parents that would help him do that.

This has totally made my day.

:D

rst20xx

06-22-2006 02:28 PM

Atari DID go out of business... ultimately they sold their brand on to Infogrammes, who after a few years of publishing some of their games under the "Atari" brand eventually started publishing them all under that brand.

Predabot1

06-22-2006 02:58 PM

Awesome! :D A look into the heart of the new Marvel offices! I have some hopes for this comic, that it will provide the same great humour and err.. fan-service as Daughters of the Dragon did.

PS: Hank Pym can do everything the Bug can, except better. ^^

Don Mega

06-22-2006 04:39 PM

Everyone on these pics looked like they had fun. Man, now I know why Marvel comics are so great these days. It shows when people are in a good mode at work.

Swift

06-22-2006 04:43 PM

I wonder if Dan Didio has a Marvel statue on his desk?

Says a lot about how cool Joe is.

slI01

06-22-2006 05:23 PM

Billy this inside look is so cool. It really makes me want to move there and look for a job. Maybe they need a janitor.

I look at all of the artwork on the walls and I am so jealous.

As far as the letter from Blake. I am wondering if Spiderman was kind enough to write back?

It took me a while to find this photo. But I wanted to share it with all. Here is another shot of that hottie model you use. For BlackCat



Now how about your model for Tarantula.

AbeFroman

06-22-2006 05:40 PM

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Swift**

I wonder if Dan Didio has a Marvel statue on his desk?

Says a lot about how cool Joe is.

Good eye. I didn't catch Harley the first time.

The office looks pretty much exactly like I pictured: clean but cluttered, lots of posters and art on the walls, and models and action figures friggin' everywhere. Cool stuff.

Chance

06-22-2006 07:17 PM

I'm going to need to scrub my eyes out. Seeing Carol Channing's face will do that.

BlackCatGuy

06-22-2006 07:20 PM

Billy, great column.....again!!

Thanks for that look into the Hallowed Halls of Marvel!!

Oh, and keep pushing for more Black Cat!!:D You've got a ton of supporters out here!

(and I really want to know about the "Carol Channing Incident"! Sounds like there's a LOT of promise there! lol!!!)

RedRonin

06-22-2006 07:45 PM

Okay, now I really want to know about the Carol Channing Incident.

Little Blake's letter brought a huge smile to my face. Good to see kids are still reading comics.

EvilEric

06-22-2006 07:46 PM

that just sounded like damn fun! Great article man!:D

Billy Tucci

06-22-2006 08:28 PM

The near death of Carol Channing.

Quote:

Originally Posted by **EvilEric**
Life's too short to be an ass... Fanboy up!

Word.

My girlfriend (now wife) and I were cruising down 5th Avenue on my Ninja ZX-11 when I wanted to get something to eat. I think I had to take a piss real bad as well and sort said the hell with traffic. So I jumped on the sidewalk (it was a Saturday) and just rode for a while before turning onto 63 rd. street = when WHAM! All I saw was the unmistakable face of Ms. Channing who screamed "OH MY GOOOOOODDDDD!", she realed back and someone caught her. Now this is a BIG motorcycle so I was abit surprised that it did a bit of a "stoppy" with the ass end popping up (Debi with it). Quickly, oh so quickly I turned as EVERYONE was yelling at me -- "You almost killed Carol Channing you maniac!", jumped the curb and took off with Deb repeatedly smacking me in the head!

But I got away and guess she didn't die of a heart attack so everything worked out in the end. I promised Deb I wouldn't ride on sidewalks anymore.

At least with her on it.

Tally Ho.

beta-ray

06-23-2006 02:35 AM

Another great column, thanks for doing these!

BlackCatGuy

06-23-2006 07:30 PM

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Billy Tucci**
Word.

My girlfriend (now wife) and I were cruising down 5th Avenue on my Ninja ZX-11 when I wanted to get something to eat. I think I had to take a piss real bad as well and sort said the hell with traffic. So I jumped on the sidewalk (it was a Saturday) and just rode for a while before turning onto 63 rd. street = when WHAM! All I saw was the unmistakable face of Ms. Channing who screamed "OH MY GOOOOOODDDDD!", she realed back and someone caught her. Now this is a BIG motorcycle so I was abit surprised that it did a bit of a "stoppy" with the ass end popping up (Debi with it). Quickly, oh so quickly I turned as EVERYONE was yelling

at me -- "You almost killed Carol Channing you maniac!", jumped the curb and took off with Deb repeatedly smacking me in the head!

But I got away and guess she didn't die of a heart attack so everything worked out in the end. I promised Deb I wouldn't ride on sidewalks anymore.

At least with her on it.

Tally Ho.

Oh, MAN! I can just hear Carol Channing saying "OH MY GOOOOOOOODDDDD!" in that.....voice..... of hers! :D

Mark McK

06-26-2006 08:46 AM

Good ol' Bayport

Hi Billy-

Sparacio told me you've been mentioning Bayport and McKenna in the same sentence lately and I love you for it. The truth is, I wasn't born there, but moved there when I was 8 years old. I was born in Flushing, Queens(prob some home of another comic stud, who can now mention me in his/her column).

Oh yeah, while I'm at it, I did ink Iron Man for a year...back in 1993! I currently ink Exiles.

I have inked about 6500 pages though, so you almost got it all right. :D

Thanks for the nod.

MMcKenna

All times are GMT -4. The time now is 08:03 PM.