

SELF PUBLISHER MAGAZINE

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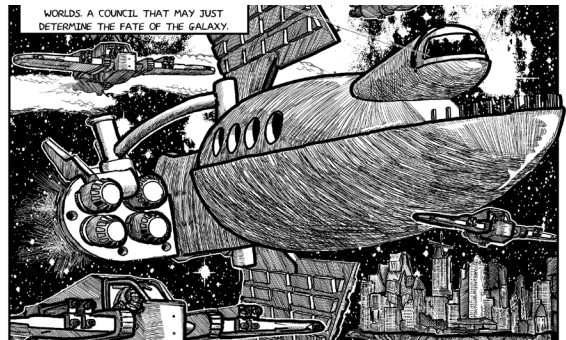
Douglas Owen

So, I have been spending a good amount of time trying to address the direction that this magazine needs to take to truly become effective and important, both as a tool for publicity for publishers, and as a source of finding out what is new and good for readers. I've asked people, I've poked and prodded, and I've come to the conclusion that, even though there is a solid number of people who love what we're doing and want to see it continue, there is next to no one who is willing to really support the effort. The Self Publisher Association, which was once a thriving and active community of publishers that worked together on common goals... is right now about six people who have not given up on the idea that if we DO NOT work together, then corporate interests win. They have already taken over most of the ideas and things we identified as important in the mid-00s. It didn't help that I got ill in 2010. I've spent the last two years digging in, trying to show that this is all worth getting behind. I don't know if we're going to hit any real level of effectiveness any time soon. All I can do is keep trying.

To that end, a new feature should be debuting next issue. I've been trying to figure out the best ways to get something like this going for a while. I've gone to the top online distributors of digital content and I'm working out deals to get access to information on their top-selling stuff. I am going to present this information in an ongoing column that lets people know what is trending and where to get it. I am not asking these companies for exact sales figures; I do not think it would be workable to do this with that sort of comparison attached, where people would say oh, XXX company is better than YYY based on those figures. That's not the purpose of this magazine. We want to have a level playing field, for all companies. So when we say XXX company's #4 title is THIS, we will not be comparing it to YYY company's #4 title... We will be attempting to show that this is popular at that company, and therefore worth checking out. So, that's going to be the new feature, starting next issue.

We are in talks with a few new columnists as well. We hope to debut a webcomics column next issue and we're always, always open to hear from YOU, the person reading this, about what YOU want to see in SP!. I ask that often and in many places, and it continues to baffle me that almost no one ever speaks up. But I'll just keep plugging away at the SP! Hall of Fame stuff. We've been adding tons of new names and companies and books there, and I'm edging my way toward being able to say I'm ready to begin building the yearly nomination/induction structure for it. I am pleased with the progress and I am fully aware of how much more really needs to be done. It would go faster if people were really supporting this, but I also know that until I've cracked the code of how to get massive amounts of readers really checking us out, publishers are going to continue to put this on the "hope it grows" shelf. And I understand why that's the way things are. I guess I just wish I had a few clones of me, so I could get more done. Let's keep going!

- Ian Shires



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Having big fun on the BAYOU

An Interview with Jimmy Pearson

By: Ellen Fleischer

Jimmy Pearson is an Australian-born, UK-based graphic novelist. He is the creator of the Southern gothic Bayou Arcana series, *The Reckoning*, the newly-released *Heart of War*, and the upcoming *Cogs and Claws* and *Engines of Eternity*. 2014 promises to be a busy year for Jimmy and we're glad he had the time to talk with SP! about his works and experiences.

SP!: How long have you been writing in comics?

JP: I have written and drawn comics since I was a kid. Been creating comics on a professional level for seven years now. Freelanced here and there as an illustrator/writer for years, and am now working for magazines and radio. In my mind, the publication of *Bayou Arcana* marked my arrival as a fully-fledged pro writer.

SP!: Has this always been your ambition?

JP: Writing in one form or another has always been my ambition. Comics and movies have pretty much been the focus, but in reality, it was a long and convoluted path to arrive at this place. My first paid writing work was done for an Australian music magazine, which I loved, but there is only so much of the rock 'n roll lifestyle one can handle, so that was only a short—but highly enjoyable—chunk of my career. Got to meet some of my guitar heroes and hang out with a few very interesting folk, so it was a great way to cut my teeth and discover the unforgiving god of deadlines. For years, I dabbled in movie scripts, but after a treatment pitching session with one of the big American studios, I was left with the impression that Hollywood is not looking for the next original idea... They want a business plan, complete with projected returns. I had one project that was in development with a "name" producer, but

that went nowhere, so I returned to my first love, which has always been comics. She is a hard mistress, but still a lot kinder than the Hollywood studio system. I would love to see one or more of my books hit the big screen. That would feel a little like coming around full circle, albeit via the back door.

SP!: How did you get started?

JP: Mocking up my own comic books as a kid was my start. Emulating my DC and Marvel comics heroes was how I learned to produce a comic from thumbnail to letters and inks. I spent countless hours of my childhood writing and drawing "sequels" to *Star Wars* and *Alien*. American movies and comics were my major influences, but then I started reading Stephen King and his seemingly-endless torrent of material really shaped me as writer.

Even though I was always writing scripts and half-baked novels, I always figured that I would break into the comics industry as an artist. After many conventions spent trudging from table to table, my portfolio under my arm, it took a couple of years to come to the conclusion that, even though I am a competent artist, that there are guys and gals out there that are virtually wizards with pencils... if not gods. And I was, alas, a mere mortal.

Luckily for me, even though the illustration work was not getting my foot under the door, comic pros were taking notice of the scripts and, most importantly, concepts I was coming up with for the sample pages of artwork. My first big break as a comic writer came in 2007 at the Birmingham International Comics Show (BICS). A "pitching competition" event was held with a panel of industry names judging. I was feeling a tad despondent that my artwork

was not being gobbled up by hungry publishers, so figured I'd give the competition a shot and I won it. It was a real landmark moment for me.

Appropriately enough, the script I pitched was *The Heart of War*, which is finally hitting shelves in March. The next big break came in the form of meeting John Higgins, who has got to be one of the most decent and kindest guys in the industry. He is a legend (*Watchmen*, *The Killing Joke*, *2000AD*, *Razorjack*) and the fact that he was prepared to work with me and hone my scripting skills to a point that my story befit rendering by a professional artist was invaluable. John's gently brutal critique was what eventually gave me the confidence that I could deliver material worthy of a publisher's time and attention. Before that, I would approach a publisher thinking that they were doing me a favor by even acknowledging my existence. Now it is more like, "You really should check out this treatment guys... It's good."

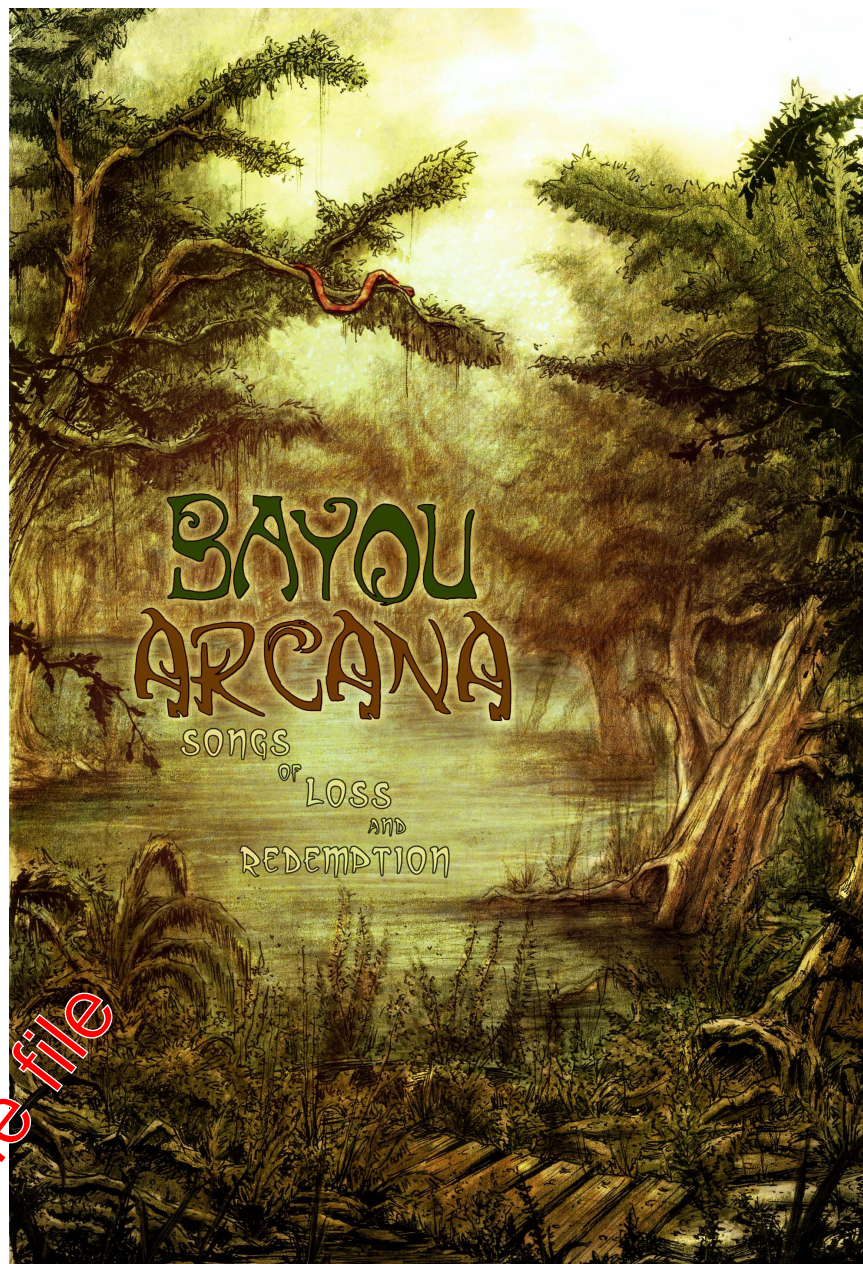
That confidence (even though it needs tempering, to be sure) is the true key to success. Being able to look into the eye of a publisher and feel proud of what you are trying to sell them is so vital. It is equally important to remain open to positive criticism, but I have dealt with enough publishing to know that, even if it takes trying a zillion avenues, if you have the drive and material to back it up, somebody is going to pick up on it eventually. The comic book community is a very welcoming one and I suggest to any aspiring creators to go to as many conventions as possible, show your work to the pros, listen and learn

SPI: Let's talk a bit about your early work. What can you tell us about *Bayou Arcana*?

JP: That is a funny question, because at the moment, I am working my way back through all of the scripts and concepts I concocted years ago. *The Heart of War* is a prime example. I came up with that concept back in 2001 and it is only now that it is seeing the light of day.

Bayou Arcana (ISBN: 978-1-905692-75-0) was my breakthrough book. I had worked with Harper Collins in the past on their *How To Cartooning?*, but *Bayou Arcana* was my first time working closely with a publisher and a team of creatives to produce a complete finished book.

BA started off as a short ten-page origin story that told the plight of escaped slaves who found a home in a mythical magical Louisiana swamp. I had the urge to come up with a Southern Gothic comic universe that touched upon various important points in African-American history. I wrote that initial story and shoved it away in a drawer. It finally resurfaced after a drunken conversation with a very sober Harry Markos at BICS (once again!) in 2009. I tried to pin him down on what was attractive to publishers at that particular moment and he answered, "Horror... Horror for the female market."



Bayou Arcana fit the bill perfectly.

It was on the train ride home from Birmingham that the idea dawned on me that it could be very cool to not only come up with a horror franchise with a women's market in mind, but also get female creators to render it. Even though the press later leapt upon the "female creator" angle, we never intended for the book to become some kind of post-feminist statement of any kind. I knew a load of uber-talented female artists and it just seemed like a cool idea to work with them. I also liked the idea of teaming up the women artists with male writers and seeing what would result.

Stacey Whittle and Lee Grice (of Small Press Big Mouth fame) put out a call for creators on their Geek Syndicate podcast and pretty soon, we had a pretty awesome international (UK, Scotland, Greece, Mexico, Australia) team assembled. It was the first time I got to work with Cy Dethan, who is one of my favourite writers, bar none. Without Stacey and Lee championing the project right from the start, I do not know how long it would have taken to get off the ground. But they did and I am very proud of the results. We have a book that is populated by some incredible characters and some really heart-wrenching tales, both scary and emotional. I think that the sensitive nature of the book was done justice by the creators