

THE COLUMN

ISSUE #11

10.02.2002

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In CBR Exclusives

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This week was to be my third and final interrogation of a major company boss but, sadly, Paul Levitz declined to be interviewed. It's a shame because DC was potentially the most interesting subject given the amount of passion they seem to generate on the message-boards at the moment. I tried a couple of times and even offered Paul both an advance look at the questions and an opportunity to review the finished draft before publication, but he said he definitely wanted to pass. For reasons of balance and to bring this particular little arc to a close, I'd like to publish the initial questions I had for him anyway so readers can at least feel they're getting SOMETHING for the tremendous effort of clicking on this link.

MARK MILLAR: Paul, you've been with DC almost as long as I've been alive. You cut your teeth as an enthusiastic commentator and achieved critical success in the late seventies as a freelance writer. For a long time, you were regarded as a champion of creators' rights and were held in high regard by the general readership. However, in these last few years you've been attacked like no other comic-book boss since Jim Shooter. How does this make you feel?

MM: I live in a small country where there's only around six million people. The city I live near has a small local paper which sells twice as many copies as DC's global sales of some of the world's most famous characters. How do you feel this can be rectified?

MM: Many have wondered why DC isn't fighting back against the recent Marvel juggernaut. Rumors persist that DC is a tax write-off for Warner Brothers and can therefore incur almost any reasonable loss. Is this true?

MM: If DC isn't trying to stay below a certain sales threshold, why don't you utilize the enormous advantages which AOL/ Time-Warner offer to promote and distribute literally the most famous fictional characters on the planet?

MM: Paul, you've got a really admirable record when it comes to staff loyalty. In all your years at DC, firings have been very rare and I know you stuck by your guys when it would have been easier to just slash numbers like Marvel and every other company did in a shrinking market. Is it true that they still received annual, inflation-related salary jumps every year too?

MM: If so, why are freelancers still generally working for the same page-rates as they were in the mid-nineties?

MM: Back in the late eighties, DC lost award-winning writers like (Alan) Moore and (Frank) Miller and, rumor has it, this was why Jenette Kahn was stripped of some of her responsibilities at the time. Are you concerned that the bulk of the award-winning and sales-generating talent are mostly working for Marvel Comics at the moment?

MM: Is it true that there's a company-wide ban on certain creators at DC because they've 'rocked the boat' in the past?

MM: Congratulations on signing Azzarello and Ellis to exclusive contracts. They're two of the best writers in the industry at the moment. Are you a fan of their particular books?

MM: In March 2000, when Frank Quitely and I took over The Authority, we raised the sales on what was already a very, very commercial book when everything else in the industry seemed to be dropping. Over the space of a few months, we made this Wildstorm's top-selling title and DC's third or fourth biggest seller. We also won several awards, huge mainstream media interest and Wizard's Book Of The Year for our first two story-arcs. Why did you still feel it was important to personally vet every script yourself and review every page of artwork when this has never been done for another book?

MM: In 1999, DC bought Wildstorm to attain the largest market share in the industry. Looking at recent figures, I see that Marvel has gained the upper-hand again and the Wildstorm numbers are almost negligible. What went wrong?

MM: Do you feel decisions like The Authority's cancellation contributed to Wildstorm's enormous slump and sales on what were once top-sellers now ranking outside the Top 100?

MM: DC was the first American company to seek out British talent and yet now there are almost no Brits working on any of the books. Are they missed?

MM: Will DC ever drop the comics code?

Thank you, DC Comics.