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Creating an Australian Comic Book Series

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Abstract:

What methods do writers and illustrators use to visually approach the comic book page in an American Superhero form that can be adapted to create a professional and engaging Australian hero comic?

The purpose of this research is to adapt the approaches used by prominent and influential writers and artists in the American superhero/action comic-book field to create an engaging Australian hero comic book. Further, the aim of this thesis is to bridge the gap between the lack of academic writing on the professional practice of the Australian comic industry. In order to achieve this, I explored and learned the methods these prominent and professional US writers and artists use. Compared to the American industry, the creating of comic books in Australia has rarely been documented, particularly in a formal capacity or from a contemporary perspective. The process I used was to navigate through the research and studio practice from the perspective of a solo artist with an interest to learn, and to develop into an artist with a firmer understanding of not only the medium being engaged, but the context in which the medium is being created. This means both in the American genre and its adaptation in Australia within the context of the local scene.

Comic books in Australia are considered an "invisible art" (Patrick 2010), with an overwhelming majority of the population unaware that Australian comics are being produced in various parts of the country. While the average person should be able to recall at least one incarnation of the character Superman, be it from the comic books, live action films, animation, video games, or other licensed media, the same cannot be said for an Australian equivalent. The aim of this thesis is not to spur on an industry, which has not been near the levels of its wartime peak since cheap US imports were allowed back into Australian for distribution in 1959. However, in recent years, there has been a mind shift in the Australian comics scene, with writers and artists, from a range of skill bases, creating original and creator-owned works for public consumption. The better of these comic books and graphic novels look towards the more popular and widely available American and other overseas products in terms of printing quality and presentation, and, more importantly, an understanding of the verbal and visual language that separate the good comic books (that entertain and communicate well from a visual standpoint) from the bad ones.

In terms of methodology, this research was completed through a combination of gathering information from historical overviews, attending seminars and Master classes both in Australia (as a professional attendee or advertised guest) and in notable international conventions such as San Diego Comic-Con, reading and holding interviews, and action research—engaging with the studio work, gaining professional feedback, and working with professionals. The process also involved understanding a selection of action and superhero comics produced by the creators mentioned throughout, with an attempt to see the theories and history outlined in the articles, books and interviews through their practice. The influential period of "The Silver Age" of superhero comics, defined by the work of Jack Kirby and Stan Lee in particular, become a strong discussion point throughout the research, as much of what occurs in the genre and art form after their appearance is an effort to capitalise on the production methods and energy these creators captured on the page.

Overall, my objective was not only to establish the context of the Australian and American comic book scenes in relation to superhero comics, the environment and output in general, but also to identify the methods used by these creators. As storytelling is paramount to comic books, the research focused primarily on the methods used by writers in relation to scripts and plotting, and how the artists (primarily, the pencillers) work with the writer to craft a clear, engaging and entertaining story; panel by panel, page by page. Other steps in the process are referred to, including the role of the editor, colouring, inking and lettering in the context of the studio work produced in conjunction with the research.

The results of the research proved to be an evolving and ongoing process for the studio work, and established that there are no definitive rules to creating comic book pages. Nevertheless, there is certainly strong evidence that an understanding of the production process, the visual language involved (particularly when it comes to superhero and action comics), and knowing the fundamentals of comic book making allows one to be able to reach their potential in creating professional and engaging work in this unique and underrated art form.

Statement of Originality:

This is to certify that this work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this research paper contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made within the research paper itself.

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Paul Mason, 28 February 2014

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Chris, Jacqui and Valentina Sequeira, Robyn and Jeff Bacchi, Chuckie, and most of all, Amanda Bacchi for her love, support, patience and encouragement.

Glossary of Terms

The following terms, which relate to comic books and illustration, are used throughout this thesis.

Art boards: Also referred to as Bristol boards, this is the thick board/paper that is used to illustrate comic book pages. Modern American comic art pages measure at 11 x 17 inches (with a 10 x 15 inches work area) and are roughly 200–260gsm on average, with some brands going heavier Pre-printed pages (printed with non-photographic blue page trim markings) come in packs of 24 (such as the BlueLine brand or Canson), but larger publishers, such as Marvel and DC Comics, provide their artists with their own printed pages to maintain consistency in art size.

Back up story: A short story, usually only a few pages in length, which sometimes features at the end of a comic book issue.

Bleed areas: The extra trim extending beyond the main comic illustration page that is meant to be cropped/cut away to make a page for the comic book. Bleed areas are usually a non-essential 10mm (but this varies according to the printer) that accounts for the printer not cutting exactly to the crop marks or paper movement during the printing process. If there was no bleed area and the cutting was not accurate, white unprinted edges would appear around the pages.

Bronze Age of Comics: This phrase describes the period of the American comic book industry of the 1970s to mid-1980s, where a new age of comic book creators, who were fans of comic book creators of the 1950s and 1960s, began working for the big publishers, and the industry became more self-sustaining. Taking the lead from Stan Lee's and Jack Kirby's superhero stories that focused on flawed characters and stories based in the context of the real world climate, stories became more socially conscious and artwork became more sophisticated under the influence of illustrators like Neal Adams. This, in turn, led the Comics Code Authority (CCA) to review the rules governing comic book censorship. Not only did stories begin to refer to the dangers of drugs and the flaws of the American political climate (e.g., Watergate, post-Vietnam), but also included horror themes and horror-based characters for the first time since the CCA was created in 1954 and the closure of publishers such as EC Comics. The period produced superhero titles such as *Green Arrow/Green Lantern,* non-superhero books such as *Savage Sword of Conan, Star Wars, Monsters Unleashed, Deadly Hands of*

Kung Fu and *Kamandi: The Last Boy on Earth,* and characters such as the more internationally conscious *Uncanny X-Men* and the monster-based *Ghost Rider, Blade the Vampire hunter, Werewolf by Night, Morbius the Living Vampire, Son of Satan, The Demon, Swamp Thing, Wolverine, Luke Cage* and *The Punisher.*

Contraposto: An Italian art term that translates as 'counter-pose'. It is used to describe a human figure standing with most of its weight on one foot so that the shoulder line and waistline tilt opposite to each other. A technique that features in works of art such as Michelangelo's *David.*

Conventions: Colloquially referred to as a 'con', a convention here refers to a comic book or popular culture-based event (or 'show') that ranges in duration from a full day to a 4/5-day event, allowing fans to watch panel discussions, meet their favourite actors, artists and writers, obtain photos and autographs, dress up or cosplay as their favourite characters, purchase comic books, merchandise and memorabilia from exhibitors and creators. The larger shows (such as San Diego Comic-Con) include film, TV, video game and comic book companies promoting their latest and upcoming releases, as well as comic book editors who discuss the following year's worth of publications. They are also sometimes there to review potential 'talent' to work for their company. The larger conventions in the US also tend to section their artists and creators accordingly from professional level to medium and small press. As well as the US shows, Australian shows have an 'Artist Alley' section, featuring comic book writers, illustrators, and general drawers and hobbyists attempting to sell their books, prints, original art, original sketches, and fan art.

Creator: Comic writers or artists are often referred to as creators: this can be used twofold—as the original creators of a character/s in a comic book, or creators in the context of simply the art and story the writer and artist have crafted. In the context of this thesis, and generally across the reference material used in the research, 'creator' is used to describe any writer or artist who has written or drawn an original comic work, particularly if they are known to have created the original characters featured in the comic book. For example, Steve Ditko can be said to be a comic creator (or co-creator) of *The Amazing Spider-man* (1963) comic series and related characters (with Stan Lee as a creator and writer). John Romita Sr. would also be considered a creator, for, although not the original instigator of *The Amazing Spider-man,* he plotted many of the

stories after Ditko left the series in 1966, and co-created the characters that featured in subsequent series. However, as the primary roles of writer and artist in this case are the considered creators, someone like Sam Rosen, a letterer on the series, would not be referred to as a creator. A project can have a sole creator (such as Frank Miller being the writer and artist creator of the 1986 book *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*), or multiple creators, particularly if the editor of a series dictates the character be created, such as the case in the *X-Men* character *Wolverine* (see *The Incredible Hulk #180–181* 1974), for which creator credits include Len Wein (writer of the comic books that *Wolverine* first appeared in), Herb Tribe (artist of the comic books *Wolverine* first appeared in), John Romita Sr. (Marvel Comics art director who designed the costume for *Wolverine)* and Roy Thomas (editor of the comic books that pitched the name and some basic characteristics/suggestions for Len Wein to begin with for the character). Confusingly, the term is sometimes used in the context of anyone working on a comic book series, or graphic novel, much in the same way that a filmmaker could be said to be the creator of a film. So the creators of the *Batman* comic book series beginning in 2011 would be Scott Snyder and Greg Capullo as the writer/artist team, not necessarily the creators of the character *Batman.*

Credit: Much like a film or television show production, this refers to when the name of someone features within a comic book or graphic novel because they had something to do with the final product (for example, the writer or editor) as way of acknowledgement. The more prolific the character, series or publisher, the more weight the 'credit' has to potential editors, peers, and the reading audience.

Crop marks/Cropped pages: Comic book pages are printed out onto sheets of paper larger than the actual page dimensions. In order for the printers to assemble the books and pages correctly, pages need to be created with extra space around the page edges (or bleed area), with markers indicating where the printers should cut the edge of the paper to create the page.

Dark Age: This phrase describes the period of the American comic book industry from the mid-1980s and to the 1990s, where stories became grittier, darker in theme, had more violent characters, and anti-heroes became the popular trend, with creators such as Frank Miller (*Daredevil, Batman: The Dark Knight Returns)* and Alan Moore (*Watchmen*), becoming popular. This was perhaps a response to the American political

climate (under President Ronald Reagan) and Hollywood trends (with the emergence of action movies starring Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone). The period bore heightened popularity in superhero characters such as *Wolverine, The Punisher, the black-costume Spider-man* and characters created such as *Deadpool, Cable, X-Force, Spawn, Venom, Carnage,* and *Doomsday.*

Embargo: In this thesis, 'embargo' relates to the print import embargo established in 1939 by the Australian government that effectively banned (among other titles and mediums) American comic books, allowing local content and publishers to flourish. When the embargo was lifted in 1959, it effectively wiped out the local comic book industry, businesses, publishers and distributors.

Fan Art: Single image illustration of a copyrighted character drawn by an artist not working for the business/company that owns it. Usually, the illustration is a non-solicited image by an artist who could be considered a 'fan' of said character or company.

Free Comic Book Day: Beginning in 2002, Free Comic Book Day, or 'FCBD', is a one-day annual event held worldwide (in countries such as USA, Canada, the UK, and Australia) on the first Saturday in May. FCBD involves participating retailers, publishers and Diamond distributions, involving comic book stores giving away promotional comic books released by publishers specifically to give away free to customers who go to the stores on the day. The stores do have to pay for the comic books, but the idea is that the material in the free comics are either previews of upcoming stories, or exclusive stories that connect to a wider-expanding story. It also acts to boost interest in comic books to perhaps those who have not read them or a particular title before, and/or encouraging new regular customers. Some stores hold sales, such as discounted back issues and TPBs/Graphic novels, mini-artist alleys, and/or invite comic book artists to draw sketches/do signings to entertain people who attend on the day.

Foreshortening: The technique used in drawing to give the perception of correctly proportioned object in depth, by the use of scale and overlap. For example, a character's arm thrust forward towards the viewer would be drawn with a seemingly shorter arm, and larger hand in comparison to the opposite arm, but with the intention to mimic the

depth perception of an actual arm projected forward in space. This would be closely related to the application of perspective in drawing.

Golden Age of Comics: This phrase describes the period of the burgeoning American comic book industry of the 1930s–1940s wartime, where a myriad of characters and titles were created, spurred by the solid comic book sales of characters such as *Superman*. New publishers and titles grew, and comic books sold off newsstands in the millions, fuelled by pro-war sentiments. The Golden Age led to other genres in comics, which became more popular than superheroes when World War Two ended, including horror, western, crime, funny animals, romance, and science fiction. This period ended in the early 1950s when senate enquiries into the links of comic books to juvenile delinquency (supported by Dr. Fredrick Wertham and his views on comics in his book *Seduction of the Innocent*) severely damaged the reputation of comic books, causing the industry to contract and publishers to fold. The period produced the original superhero characters such as *Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Captain America, The All-Winners Squad, The Justice Society of America,* the original *Flash,* the original *Green Lantern, Namor the Submariner, The Human Torch* and *Captain Marvel.*

Guttering: The space between the panels on a comic book page. Guttering represents the illusion of time passing between the panel images. They can be clearly represented as the white space of a page, coloured, or merely an implied structure, based on the illustrative style and design of the layout.

One-Shot: A single issue, self-contained comic book, not intended to be part of a series.

Panels: The bordered, (generally) rectangular-shaped boxes on a comic book page that contain a single image or moment of time for a comic book story. It is not to be confused with interview/Q &A style comic book conventions panels featuring guests and audiences.

Perspective: The techniques used by pencillers and artists to draw/render three-dimensional shapes/environments on a two-dimensional surface, to make the objects/items look ‘correct’ in terms of their height, length and depth. In comics,

perspective is commonly associated to the drawing of buildings, vehicles and figures in space.

Pin-up: A full page, poster-like illustration featuring a character (or group) in a single image, usually dramatically composed.

Pitch process: The process by which writers discuss possible story ideas with an editor in order to obtain work. This is a very general description, as the writer pitching a story to editor can occur in a myriad of different ways, usually on a case-by-case basis; that is, sometimes solicited, sometimes unsolicited, in person, via email, Skype, etc.

Scene: This term is used in this document to describe the overall comic book production in Australia in lieu of the term 'industry', which this thesis argues against. Outside of just a small handful of small independent comic book and graphic novel publishers, comic books in Australia are made up of hobbyists, self-publishing individual artists and writers, with a tiny output and small record in relation to countries such as America, Japan, and Europe. Without a solid and self-sustaining means of production, distribution network, or visible sustainable audience to support the product in Australia, 'scene' seems an appropriate term to describe the local situation.

Shops: Not to be confused with Comic Book shops, which did not emerge more commonly until the 1980s' direct market growth, 'Shops' refers to the studio-like settings used by the Golden Age artists and writers during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, where they produced the early American comic books. The Shop setup was created to be much like the Henry Ford business model of an assembly-line production process, but this time for comics, with separate writers, pencillers, inkers, colourists, letterers, etc., working on comic stories for the sake of a higher output in a shorter amount of time.

Silver Age of Comics: This phrase describes the American comic book industry of the mid-1950s through to about the beginning of the 1970s, where, after the 1954 fallout of Dr. Fredrick Wertham's crusade against comics/the Kefauver senate hearings into comic books and juvenile delinquency, the superhero genre was revived by DC Comics editor Julius Schwartz, by updating the Golden Age characters with science-fiction/atomic age/Cold War–underpinned origins and stories. This began with

characters such as creation of *The Martian Manhunter* and the revival of *The Flash* and *Green Lantern* (with sleek design work by Carmine Infantino, and Gil Kane respectively). Marvel Comics rose as one of the prominent publishers in the early 1960s with their re-invention of the superhero archetypes and the type of storytelling and characterisation never before seen in comic books, by way of heroes with flaws, humanized problems, and story conflicts of grand scale (such as *The Fantastic Four #48 – 50* (1966), known as *The Galactus Trilogy*). While Jack Kirby's art and Stan Lee's scripting and editorial influence were the cornerstone of the period, Kirby's departure from Marvel in 1970s marked the end of the Silver Age (although the softening of the CCA guidelines, or the death of character *Gwen Stacy* in *Amazing Spider-man* by way of a broken neck perhaps ended the relative innocence of the Silver Age approach). The period produced superhero characters such as revivals of sci-fi based *The Flash* and *Green Lantern, The Justice League,* and new characters such as *Spider-man, The Fantastic Four, Iron Man, The Hulk, The Silver Surfer, Daredevil, The Avengers, the Doom Patrol, Captain Atom* and *The X-Men.*

Splash page: Originating from Will Eisner's *The Spirit* newspaper strip from the 1940s, and incorporated into standard comic books, the splash page, or 'full-page splash' is a poster-like, full-page image that acts as a title page, and is generally featured at the beginning of a comic book/graphic novel (or within the first few pages) to set the mood for the story. In its newspaper origins, it was used to catch the eye of the reader flicking through the paper. It usually contains a large pin-up style image, the comic book and story title, and writer/artist credits.

Story beats: Events or incidences occurring in a story, usually written line by line in an attempt to map the major characteristics of a story in a summarised form.

The Big Two: The colloquial term for Marvel and DC Comics, the two largest comic book publishers (in terms of market share) in America.

Third-Party Licensing: When a publishing company such as IDW, Dynamite or Boom! Studios publish a comic book series and/or holds the publishing license to a character or property (usually from film, TV, book or a comic book character) from another company, thereby giving them the ability to publish stories based on that character and property. Usually case by case involving the contracted details, an

example of this would be IDW having the third- party license to publish *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (formerly from Mirage studios, the original creators of the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* comic) and related material, which is a property/franchise (which includes characters likenesses, details, story history, universe etc.) owned by Viacom/Nickelodeon. They are therefore not characters that IDW own, but that they license from a third party.

Three-act narrative structure: Traditional cinematic storytelling arc utilised in classic stories and film scripts, which is structured into three acts; essentially, a beginning (introduction and inciting incident), middle (complications), and end (climax and resolution).

Trade Paberback (TPB): A format that is either a self-contained original graphic novel, or often reprints a complete (or several issues of a) story arc originally released as single-issue comic books. This format also allows comic books to be more readily available in libraries and bookstores due to their thicker format and spine.

Universe: A term referring to the constantly expanding fictional reality that features the characters and stories created in comic books. For example, the Marvel 'Universe' features all the worlds, characters and storylines owned by Marvel Comics, and fits within a framework of a fictional reality where events and stories all relate and interconnect in relation to the characters that inhabit it. For instance, if a reader is reading a *Spider-man* comic (published by Marvel Comics), the 'Universe' for that book involves characters such as *Captain America* (also published by Marvel Comics) being active and fighting in World War 2. To *Spider-man*, that part of history exists in the context of his universe. (For use of the term in an academic context, see Hatfield 2012, 88.)

The "Origin" of 'The Soldier Legacy'.
Published in March 2012 in the *Beginnings Anthology* by the ACT Comic Meet.

"Page 1, Panel 1…": Creating an Australian Comic Book Series

Introduction

What are the methods used by American comic book writers and illustrators to produce American superheroes, that can be adapted to create a professional and engaging Australian superhero comic?

This project evolved from a somewhat naive exercise to a significant undertaking. Initially, my goal was to expand on an Australian comic book character I had previously developed for my Honours project. The idea was to expose the Honours comic book to an audience, and develop the series by learning to use the methodologies practiced by American comic book professionals, and document the research. In general, very little academic research on the comic book medium exists; in Australia, there is virtually nothing available on the Australian comic book environment or the methods of writers and artists practicing in this field.

The question raised for this thesis encompasses a number of important and diverse areas, which I will clarify in order to state the overall position of the final output. They are as follows:

- The methods writers and artists use to visually approach the comic book page (method);
- The American superhero genre in comic books (context);
- Australian hero comics, and/or the Australian comic book 'scene' in general (context);
- The tasks involved in creating a professional and engaging comic book (output).

Each area involved its own research and I experienced some problems in accessing information. Generally, there were many articles and analysis on either particular superhero story arcs, specific superheroes and the archetypes, or themes covered in superhero stories. There is, however, very little published that considers the various methods creators use to create comics, and virtually nothing in the way of Australia comics from an academic standpoint. Former self-publisher, journalist and notable comics researcher Kevin Patrick writes:

> Given the sporadic attention paid by Australian academics to comics generally, recording the history of comic books in Australia has been largely left to fans and collectors themselves. They performed the 'heavy lifting' of discovery, documentation and research which, in any other field of print culture inquiry, would normally have been the preserve of academics. (Patrick 2010)

Thus, the overall aim of this thesis is to bridge the gap that exists in academic writing on the professional practice of the Australian comic industry.

Unlike the scant literature available on Australian comics, there are an increasing number of texts surfacing from writers regarding the history of American comics. For example, publishing houses such as TwoMorrows have an extensive range of material[1], and Professor Charles Hatfield's *Hand of Fire: The Comic Art of Jack Kirby* (Hatfield 2012). There are also numerous journal articles devoted to specific comic characters, particular themes, and superheroes as a conceptual topic. However, not many texts are published by an established comic industry artist/writer professional that comment on methodology. This thesis references several books published in this field (e.g., *Panel Discussions*, *The DC Comic guides*[2], *Understanding Comics*), and interviews with artists from books and magazine series previously mentioned, but these amount to only a small number. Even less has been written or published that comments on the current Australian scene, particularly from an insider's perspective. However, this too seems to be changing; it should be noted that the first interdisciplinary symposium 'Inkers and Thinkers—The Evolution of Comics' will be held in April 2014 at the University of Adelaide, which includes a number of published Australian cartoonists discussing comic theory. Australian cartoonist Pat Grant (writer/illustrator of graphic novel *Blue*, published by Top Shelf in 2012) is also finishing a PhD thesis on the topic of Australian comics in the context of his work, and Australian illustrator Phil Bentley has released an autobiography *A Life in Comics: A Personal History of Comics in Australia 1960–1990* (as reported on *Fragments from a Second Shore* blog, 19 November 2013), which will depict his time in Australian comics. Despite attempts at a collective whole, the Australian 'scene' is pocketed, which means that much of this knowledge remains localised to each state, city or region.

[1] Including the *Modern Masters* books and the *American Comic Book Chronicles* series, and book series discussing the works and methods from artist and writers, such as *John Romita...And All That Jazz* (Thomas and Amash 2007), *Sal Buscema: Comic's Fast and Furious Artist* (Amash and Nolen-Weathington 2010), their magazine series such as *Comic Book Artist* (such as Cooke 2002), Roy Thomas's *Alter Ego*, *Back Issue* (such as Eury 2010), and *The Jack Kirby Collector* (such as Morrow 2004).

[2] The various titles in the DC Comic Guide series can be found in the References and bibliography section.

Noted American pop culture historian Arlen Schumer, author/designer of *The Silver Age of Comic Book Art* (2003), encapsulates one of the motivations for my research: "both lay and comic audiences know far more about traditional art—painting, sculpture, and now computer graphics—than they know about how comic book art is actually produced" (Schumer 2012, 15). Schumer made this comment in relation to a discussion of how prolific comic book writer Stan Lee and comic book artist Jack Kirby are publicly perceived. The Marvel Comics of the 1960s that changed superhero comics, influenced the American comic book industry, and currently provide Hollywood with much of their blockbuster film material, resulted from a small number of creators helmed by editor and publisher Stan Lee and the creative mind of artist and story plotter Jack Kirby. However, Stan Lee seems to be the one who receives more acknowledgement as the creator of these comic books than his co-creators[3]. Schumer notes that Lee is thought of "as Marvel Comics' writer/creator and its 'artist'", appearing in Marvel film cameos, TV shows bearing his name, and being venerated as the "creator of the Mighty Marvel universe" (Schumer 2012, 16) of superhero characters. By contrast, Jack Kirby is virtually unknown to the general audience; he is barely mentioned and his contribution is glossed over. This is one of the many points from sources that validates my research: if the writer of the most prominent superhero and action comics is thought of as the solo creator, then there is something inherently missing in relation to the understanding of the general public as to how the work is produced. Writing on the Australian context, Rae comments "The two major factors contributing to the first steps forward in the growth of our present comic book industry [are] the quantity and the quality of the overseas publications" (Rae cited in Burrows and Stone 1994, 7).

Thus, Rae captures the approach that I wanted to undertake for this research. Given the size of the American industry and market in comparison to ours, it was important to research the methods used by American professionals in comics, their history with the art form (and creation), and the notable creators who have worked in comics there. Further, considering the opportunities that the overseas market has given to Australian creators who have reached a particular level of quality, and the relevance placed on the local comic reading audience for the importance of gaining said work (particularly with the bigger publishers of licensed properties, such as Marvel, DC, Dark Horse, IDW,

[3] An example source being Hatfield (2012, 89-90), which describes the 1960s collaboration with Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, the perception of Stan Lee to the then-new owners of marvel Comics in the late 1960s and one of many newspaper articles describing Marvel Comics as Stan Lee sole "vision", with more articles assuming the same.

Boom!, Image, Valiant, Dynamite, Archie, etc.), the benchmark in working in comics seems to place weight on foreign interest in the work. While the number is growing, until now, few Australians have gained work overseas, and even less have steady freelance projects. Nevertheless, there are a few currently working with either multiple companies or have had major cross-media success, such as Tom Taylor[4], Nicola Scott[5] David Yardin[6], Tristan Jones[7], Doug Holgate[8], Stewart McKenny[9], Ryan K. Lindsay[10], Jon Sommariva[11], Dean Rankine[12], Christopher Sequeira[13], Ben Templesmith[14], Ashley Wood[15], Shane McCarthy[16], and Colin Wilson (albeit from New Zealand, living in Melbourne)[17]. It should also be noted that Perth-based publisher Gestalt has managed to create overseas opportunities and foreign interest with their own Australian-created work, with writer/artist Justin Randall (*Silent Hill* and *30 Days of Night* for IDW) having his Gestalt book translated into a French edition (*Changing Ways*), and Tom Taylor and James Brouwer's *The Deep* (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.18) not only selling well at San Diego Comic-Con, but also being made into an animated television series (Freya 2013) with Tom Taylor as scriptwriter for the series, and James Brouwer as lead Art director.

Thus, it would seem that the opportunities for work in comic books, despite the incredibly competitive and selective American comic market, and almost non-existent Australian market, are actually wider than first imagined. The previous examples support my method of research: 'action research'. By this, I mean attempting to operate as a professional, by first becoming a small self-publisher of my studio work entitled

[4] with *Star Wars* (Dark Horse), *The Rocketeer* and *JinRise* (IDW), *Injustice* and *Earth 2* (DC Comics), *Superior Iron Man (*Marvel Comics) and his creator-owned graphic novel series with Gestalt *The Deep.*
[5] with *Wonder Woman*, *Secret Six*, *Earth 2* and *Convergence: New Teen Titans* (DC Comics).
[6] with *District X*, *Black Panther*, covers for *X-Factor*, *Thunderbolts* and *Magneto* (Marvel Comics) and *Injustice* (DC Comics).
[7] with *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (Mirage, IDW),*Ghostbusters* , *Silent Hill* (IDW), *Sonic the Hedgehog* covers (Archie) and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (DC/Vertigo).
[8] with his work in *Flight* anthology, *The Amazing Joy Buzzard* (Image), *Zinc Alloy*.
[9] with *Batman: Brave and the Bold* (DC Comics), *Star Wars* (Dark Horse).
[10] with *My Little Pony Micro series: Rainbow Dash* one-shot (IDW), *Headspace* (Monkeybrain inc./IDW) and *Ghost Town* (Action Lab).
[11] with *Gemini* (Image), *Free Realms* (Wildstorm), *Go Boy 7* (Dark Horse), and *TMNT* covers (IDW).
[12] with *The Simpsons* Comics (Bongo Comics), *Itty Bitty Bunnies in Rainbow Pixie Candyland* (Action Lab).
[13] with *Justice League Adventures* (DC Comics), *Astonishing Tales: Iron Man* (Marvel Comics), *X-Men vs. Vampires: Dazzler* (Marvel Comics), *Cthulhu Tales* (Boom! Studios).
[14] with *Todd McFarlane's Hellspawn* (Image), *30 Days of Night* (IDW), *Wormwood: Gentleman Corpse* (LOFI, IDW).
[15] with Spawn (Image), *Metal Gear Solid*, and working on *Judge Dredd*, Marvel and DC properties.
[16] with *Transformers: All Hail Megatron* (IDW);
[17] with *Star Wars: Invasion* (Dark Horse), *The Rocketeer* (IDW), *Battler Britton* (WildStorm), *2000AD*, *Du Plomb Dans La Tete* (adapted into the 2013 film *Bullet to the Head* starring Sylvester Stallone), and a large body of European market work.

The Soldier Legacy, exposing the work to an audience, and researching. So, my method itself became an important aspect of gathering research, making connections and creating opportunities that, in turn, created more opportunities for insight into the subject matters of the research and the development of the studio work. At its simplest level, the method was as follows: create the work, distribute/promote the work as a part of the national comic scene, gain feedback from audience and professionals, research, learn, refine, and repeat. While I did not anticipate making much headway locally, let alone overseas, and, in many respects, believed that it would take years to make any momentum in obtaining work or recognition in comic book illustration, I was surprised to find that the studio research led to exciting new opportunities. The process overall confirmed the sentiments asserted by prominent writer/creator Joe Simon: "In this business, you're always learning, whether you're 24 years old or 97. You're always working, you're always trying to improve" (Simon 2012, 59).

The serialised nature of comic books meant I was not only able to slowly build up a readership of *The Soldier Legacy*, but also interact with other professionals on a local and international scope, and attempt to build up a profile as a comic book artist in this community. With each step through the process, I was able to gain a positive position within the scene, and gain insight into how best to not only try and develop my drawing/storytelling practice, but also learn from other successful professionals. I could not have completed this research solely through reading books and articles on the subject, and I found being a fan of the medium assisted in research and study. Patrick (2010) notes this in the recorded insights of comic book history and culture in general:

> US cultural studies academic Henry Jenkins, remarking upon his own personal involvement in science-fiction/television fandom, argues that studying popular culture from a fan's perspective provides a unique opportunity to combine understanding of relevant theoretical frameworks and critical literature with firsthand 'access to the particular knowledge and traditions of [fan communities]'. (Patrick 2010)

With the creator-owned series, I was given the opportunity to then have the book published by local Australian-based comic book publisher Black House Comics, have the character feature on national television, and gain extra work including illustrating and plotting a crossover story with a *Sherlock Holmes* villain within the pages of *Dark Detective: Sherlock Holmes* (2012-2013). Further, I also worked on a short story involving a licensed character in *The New Adventures of the Human Fly #1* (2013).

These extra jobs allowed work with other writers in different capacities, which became part of the research itself. Each project is also referred to in the Appendixes.

Chapter 1: The Context of the Research, details a number of aspects that I felt were important to establish before looking at professional methods of American creators, and how my own studio efforts would impact in the community. Firstly, I aim to discuss learning about comic book methods in general. I then move on to outline American comic book history, with a focus specifically on the superhero/action-adventure genre, as this genre was fundamental in shaping not only the visual language used in mainstream comic books, but also the methods prominent among creators working in the field today. I also discuss the Australian situation regarding comics (both past and present), and the challenges a creator faces in producing work within this environment. An overview of the Australian history in relation to the superhero/action-adventure genre is given as a counterpoint, to the American history and growth, with a brief discussion on comparisons with the UK, which is again given in effort to establish context of which my work will exist.

Chapter 2: The Process/Method of American Comic Book Storytellers, details the research into the various methods of the comic book page production, exploring specifically the key storytelling aspect of the medium. There are various ways to write for a comic, as well as a number of tasks to create the visuals, so this chapter outlines what the prominent creators consider when penciling, inking, colouring and letter a comic book page, based on the written or plotted story. The context of how this relates to the studio work is touched upon during the discussion.

Chapter 3: *The Soldier Legacy* and Studio work, explains in greater detail the process conducted to create the various comic books using methods taken from the research into professional practices, and outlines the experimentation and advice/feedback process used during each studio milestone[18]. The projects listed include working as a solo creator on *The Soldier Legacy*[19], working with a writer collaboratively (in the *Dark Detective: Sherlock Holmes* comic series, which includes *The Soldier Legacy's Strange Tales #1*[20]*)*, and working with a writer via a full-script (on the US project *The New Adventures of The Human Fly #1*[21]*)*. The chapter contains discussion on the various writing methods found in Chapter 2, and what they mean in relation to the illustrator's

[18] Generally, from issue to issue, project to project.
[19] See Appendix 2.
[20] See Appendix 3.
[21] See Appendix 4.

requirements to the story, the production process, and the overall formatting of the books as well.

The final chapter discusses my findings in regards to the end point of the research, and how research into this area of the medium impacted on the studio work and the level of success regarding an Australian approach to the methods learnt.

Chapter 1: The Context of the Research

1.1 On Learning about Comic Book Creation

> *Comic Book Artist* [Interviewer]: In those days, [1960s, 1970s] you had to hunt high and low for that information [on learning about comic book creating, drawing, inking etc.]
>
> Joe Kubert: Yeah. Well, it's still true today… [I started The Joe Kubert School of Cartoon and Graphic Art]…I don't think there are many other places where you can actually gain the knowledge you need to get started…I got my knowledge from people who helped me when I tried getting in! There aren't a lot of places that you can gain that knowledge…comics are a unique form, and the tools that you use are also unique (Cooke, Schumer, and Knowles 2002, 29-30).

When I set out to research this area of art practice, my aim was to discover how comic book professionals created their work, so that I could experiment accordingly in my studio practice. Though I was able to put together a single comic book issue for my Honours project, I felt some of the comic book–making process was intuitive, rather than being able to point directly to a method of how comic book writers and artists create their work. Furthermore, there were aspects to the end product, relating to the added pressures of time frame, collaboration, and reaching an audience, that I had to reconcile with from the very beginning, and see how this process unfolded. As previously stated, my overall research methodology was action research: The idea of implementing, or putting into action, the research and theories being gathered at the time, and assessing the experience and outcomes (Dick 2000). Like many of the creators making comics in the late 1930s and 1940s[22], my learning was progressive, while creating and releasing the studio work. These earlier artists in the Golden age of comics had to produce such a high volume of work in such a short period of time that there was no ability to assess or change the work before print. They were willing to take chances and experiment with different ways to tell a story, using their tools differently. This was partly because the medium was so new (as well as the genres they were working in), and, as renowned comic book creator and teacher Joe Kubert put it, "Because of the amount of work that had to be turned out, the fear of turning out something not so good never even entered my mind" (cited in Levitz 2013, 11). As he says,

> I don't think any of [the pioneering comic book creators of the 1930s and 1940s] were proud of what they were doing, or thought that what they were doing was worthwhile. It was a matter of making a buck. This was the depression. (Kubert cited in Levitz 2013, 8)

[22] As Joe Simon describes these early years of being a comic artist and editor in *The Comic Book Makers* (Simon & Simon 2003).

This mindset behind the art making 'chores' of comic book production has changed quite dramatically since the work practices of the early artists, as skill levels, technological advancements and audiences have changed. As the number of fans dedicated to individual artists and writers has increased, comic-book critique sites, magazines, forums, related social media sites (on FaceBook, Twitter, Tumblr, etc.) have emerged; as Joe Kubert goes on to say in regards to contemporary comic book writers/artists "…you're exposing yourself completely. Not only to ridicule, but jeopardizing how you make your livelihood, which is even more important" (cited in Levitz 2013, 11). Hence, this research not only looks at the context of the medium (and genre), but also explores and discusses common professional methodologies used by comic book artists. My studio work is the by-product of this, and the tool to gaining more understanding of how the facets work. It has allowed me to travel, gain feedback and advice, meet many helpful people in the industry here and abroad, create opportunities to put this research into practice, and learn more than would have been possible by just reading articles and scribbling comic books without releasing them to public scrutiny.

Of course, it is difficult to reference an experience, a comment in a conversation, an impromptu discussion. However, experience and understanding has made finding the right material from the right sources easier, and allowed a firmer understanding of the credibility of commentators behind the words and actions. I have found that the comic book industry can be at odds with academia and researchers, albeit even from people in the local scene. Whether this is ingrained in the industry due to the working-class nature of the artists, who were the workhorses producing the output, the lack of any overall formal training needed for the profession, or simply a kneejerk reaction and suspicion to outsiders who are perceived as unfamiliar to what it takes to produce a comic book, is unknown, and purely speculation based on the histories of the artists in the field. American professionals can be college graduates or self-taught people who have reached a level of professional-standard work. A comic book artist/writer's project credits and their reputation with working with editors and other creators define them and their next project. In the Australian scene, this is harder to define, as there is very little in the way of legitimacy into professional comic creating from a local perspective, outside of a very small number of independent publishers attempting to make a name for themselves in a country that really does not have a stable market for comics (Arts Hub 2013). But, as in America, those who are more respected are the professionals with

higher or more lucratively perceived credits to their name (profile), which the majority of the time, are international credits. (Nevertheless, the fragmented nature of comic production in Australia means certain artists and authors could have noted careers, with graphic novels published with book publishers, but have never had any need to interact with the scene of creators who are predominantly self-publishers/small indie press publishers.) The more well known the property or company is, the more respect a creator receives. Unfortunately, a strong current of "tall poppy syndrome", as well as a cultural cringe to the material produced, exists in Australia, which my visits to the US confirmed as being more of a cultural issue here than anything else:

> Australia needs to get rid of the 'cultural cringe' that exists around comics once and for all, as every day more and more creative folks on this continent write and draw unique and witty comic books and graphic novels. They do it while holding down jobs, going to school, or fighting crime. (Maynard 2012)

In my interactions with American artists and editors from different fields (such as animation and film), I gathered that creators are judged there for their individual work, drive and ideas, rather than being dismissed for their country of origin (in this case, Australia), whether others' work from Australia is more popular, or who their friends are. Generally, though, I have noticed when academics and researchers in comics and animation attempt to make inroads into conversation of comics (such as in a social media setting, in articles etc.), they can be met with skepticism, or their opinion does not seem to have merit in relation to a 'professional' making comics. Comments made in response to the online article "Do Australian Superheroes Exist? The Invisible Comic Book Industry" (Kopp 2013), which concerned Australian comics history, illustrate this. For this article, journalist Naomi Kopp interviews two Australian-based PhD candidates researching the field of comics, Kevin Patrick and Amy Maynard, who provide insight on various aspects of the past and current Australian comic book industry. Kevin Patrick is a former self-publisher, journalist and notable comics researcher, and Amy Maynard's PhD research considers Australian comics; overall, they have excellent knowledge of the subject matter of Australian comics and they condense the history well. However, I believe that some of their perceptions are slightly inaccurate, as I personally know the industry professionals they refer to, and I believe I have a firm understanding in terms of comic creating within the Australian scene, and attempting comics overseas in a contemporary context. For example, Patrick's comment "I doubt that smaller-scale comics publishing would have any greater chance of success online" (Patrick, cited in Kopp 2013) does not take into account the success of crowd funding

comic book ventures online from creators in Australia. Patrick (cited in Kopp 2013) also refers to creators as being "hired guns", which is not quite correct, particularly if you consider the example of writer Tom Taylor and penciller Nicola Scott, who have had lengthy series runs with DC Comics, and are now working on a series together for DC Comics (Hennon 2013). Nevertheless, I understand Patrick's sentiment; it was just too general given the high profile of certain Australian creators and the projects they have worked on. It must also be taken into account the article is written by a reporter who is unfamiliar with Australian comics and is attempting to learn, hence talking to the PhD researchers. Further, how can one be familiar, when what is generally acknowledged as the "primary text"/history of the subject - *Panel by Panel* by John Ryan (Ryan1979) is out of print and almost forty years out of date, and comics here have almost never been in the forefront of modern mainstream media? The comments made in response to the article refer to this too, but also evidences my previous point regarding the underlying suspicion of researchers:

> This is all very interesting, but I'm not sure why you wouldn't have turned to some of the creators and publishers to talk about their first-hand experience of the 'industry' today, or even to the fact that there are numerous, particularly online, resources talking about Australian comics. (Eevie, comment on Kopp 2013)

Kopp goes on to answer the comment, and inadvertently points out that it is difficult to know about all the facets of Australian comics, as even the commentator themselves had not heard of the Australian graphic novel writer she referred to (Naomi Kopp, comment on Kopp 2013). A further comment indicates the devaluing of the comic book academic/researcher:

> …Although I am only very tangentially linked to the comics scene, I feel that sometimes there is a distance between the academic perception of how a situation is, and the reality thereof. I am in no way devaluing the work of Amy and Kevin, which is important in its own right and to the publishing history of this country, however I do feel that if you're going to talk about a current situation, it is important that the perspectives of those acting within that occurrence need to be considered. (Eevie, comment on Kopp 2013)

Ironically, the commentator, by their own admission, is not a creator themselves. This is the difficulty of examining an art form and its current situation in this country, where there are minimal authority figures or bodies, in both academic/institutional standing, or in industry or a commercial sense. Some questions that I ask myself when creating comic books within this context are as follows: Can you in fact categorise art or creation like this? Are Australian comics, or more so, Australian superhero comics, a viable

product, like their mainstream American counterparts? Or, can they encompass both, given our invisible, weak, yet unique market? This debate is heated in social media and podcasts, particularly the argument over whether the Australian comic community can be considered an industry or a scene, with arguments over the generation and motivation of "for money or for love" (Beardy and the Geek, Facebook 16 July 2013).

Part of what prompted my attempts in this research was to better integrate the idea of academic thought and consideration within the professional production of an Australian comic. Essentially though, it was an attempt to see if it was possible to learn methodologies, and put them into practice to see what can be achieved in art practice and in reaching an audience. It is a medium that deserves more consideration by the general public and academic research, not just in terms of the art but in the story content and subject matter too, as comic book illustrator and educator Klaus Janson and Will Eisner (one of the medium's biggest influences) attest to:

> The assembly line method of producing comic books has nothing to do at all with the worth and value of the medium. Sequential art and film both run the gamut from the individual auteur to the collective communal effort. There may be questions about the artistic value and potential of monthly comic books but sequential art as a medium without any doubt deserves to be on the same level as all other art forms. (Janson 2003, 63)
>
> The comics medium is no longer the novelty that it once seemed. Yet the medium is a valid form of literature, and it's an enduring medium and I believe a medium of the 21st century. (Eisner, cited in Talon 2007, 193)

1.2: The American Superhero Genre in Brief

> *...Siegel and Shuster's Superman combined these ingredients* [pulp magazine stories, science fiction] *to create a new formula for adventure stories—the superhero formula.*
> —Harvey 1996, 19

The common perception is that the superhero comic was invented when two seventeen-year-old boys, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, mixed their love of science fiction and pulp adventures into a circus strongman, leotard-wearing alien from another planet, *Superman* (see Appendix 1 Fig. 1.02). This prototype newspaper strip was bought by National Publications, the company that later became DC Comics, in 1938 (Pasko 2008, 26). That original creation heralded an avalanche of imitators trying to match the character's success. New publishers spilled into the relatively new industry of comic

books, which had only been tested a few years before, with what was considered the first American comic book, *Famous Funnies*[23] in 1934 (Simon and Simon 2003, 122), with the repackaging of newspaper strips into a newsstand-friendly, magazine format[24]. With superheroes debuting in *Action Comics #1* in 1938 (the debut of *Superman*), National continued to inadvertently shape comics and the superhero genre, with the debut of Bob Kane and Bill Finger's *Bat-man*[25] in *Detective Comics* #27 (May 1939) (Johnson 2012, 21-25). As Harvey writes, "Drawn by Bob Kane and written by Bill Finger, Batman represented the other half of what would become the traditional superhero profile" (Harvey 1996, 21) (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.01).

The period during World War two was considered "The Golden Age of Comics" (Saffel 2010, 8), as millions of comic books sold from the newsstands. Waves of emerging studios and publishers created superhero action characters, mostly rip offs or derivatives of the more successful National Publications' characters like Superman and Batman, or Timely Comics[26] hero *Captain America*, the most successful of the patriotically themed superheroes—despite MLJ Comic's *The Shield* pre-dating it by a little more than a year (Simon 2011, 99). With Joe Simon and Jack Kirby working on the series, the boundaries of what could be possible with figure drawing and dynamics of action comic strips were pushed, as comic historian Mark Evanier notes, "Simon and Kirby did ten issues of *Captain America*, and superhero comics were never the same" (Evanier 2008, 56). Fellow comic historian Jim Steranko elaborates, "If Superman and Batman were the foundations of the business, Captain America formed the cornerstone of the industry" (cited in Harvey 1996, 31) (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.03).

The Nazi party and Adolf Hitler provided superheroes with real-world villains to fight; virtually every Timely Comics hero launched their issue beating a Nazi or Japanese monster in some shape or form (Thomas and Sanderson 2007, 18-23). Superheroes would be so linked to the events of the war that when America claimed victory, popularity for the heroes faded; only the stability of large publisher DC Comics kept the characters Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman in print (Pasko 2008, 59).

[23] Published by Eastern Colour Printing.
[24] New content was eventually used in this format, with the title *New Fun* in February 1935, published by National Allied Publications (the precursor to DC Comics) (Pasko 2008, 13).
[25] The original hyphenated name dubbed by *Batman* co-creator Bob Kane, and published as such in the early issues, before the hyphen was removed to read *The Batman*.
[26] The company's title before being known as Atlas Comics in the 1950s, and eventually Marvel Comics in the 1960s.

Other genres came into vogue with the absence of superheroes; in particular, funny animals, teen comedy, romance (a genre ushered into comics by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby; Simon 2011, 165-167), and later, crime, horror, science fiction, and westerns. There were attempted revivals of the superhero genre in the early 1950s, with Atlas Comics publishing new stories featuring *Namor the Submariner, Human Torch* (Timely Comics' original superhero characters from the late 1930s) and *Captain America: Commie Smasher*. Despite it being the McCarthy era, these did not sell well, and the 1954 senate trials into comic books (and their supposed links to "juvenile delinquency", spearheaded by the writings of Dr. Fredric Wertham and his infamous book *Seduction of the Innocent*), almost ended the industry, crushing much of the market (Simon 2011, 180-186). The Comics Code Authority (CCA) was introduced, which monitored the content of comic books, and ultimately affected not only what stories could contain (virtually eradicating horror elements until the 1970s), but also overall comic sales (due to the backlash against comics in general), resulting in the collapse of many publishers and distributors (Raphael and Spurgeon 2003, 47). In terms of the superhero, DC Comics revived and re-mastered Golden Age wartime heroes, *The Flash* and *Green Lantern*, with new, "higher-tech versions", with science fiction–based origins and power sets in the mid-1950s (Schumer 2003, 8). Eventually, these characters were put into book form with perennial sellers *Batman, Superman* and *Wonder Woman*, to form *The Justice League*, a team that was said to have inspired Marvel publisher Martin Goodman to follow this latest trend, and set his editor Stan Lee to work (Raphael and Spurgeon 2003, 76-77).

This Silver Age period of comics was a huge revival of the superheroes, not just in terms of the characters that were created, but also because of the concepts and stories that were developed from Marvel Comics in particular. Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko and a handful of Atlas (soon to become Marvel Comics) artists took the science-fiction angle of the new superheroes and combined them with the genres they were having moderate success with (such as westerns, light-hearted teen dramas and monster shorts) to deliver new and fresh superheroes and stories. What made the Silver Age in particular most prevalent and influential to the genre was that stories grew in scope (such as the unofficially named "Galactic Trilogy" of *Fantastic Four* #48–50 of 1966), and characters were given greater depth and human frailties to add and counter-act their super heroic deeds. Jack Kirby, one of the driving forces behind the Silver Age of

Marvel comics, stated, “Perfect heroes are boring to the reader”; “They’ve got to have human frailties to keep the story interesting” (cited in Harvey 1996, 47).

Further, comic illustration became more sophisticated with the likes of Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko and later Gene Colan, John Buscema, John Romita, Gil Kane, etc. The new Marvel artists were all acquainted in the storytelling, pacing and visual language of Jack Kirby’s method of illustrating and plotting superhero stories (See Chapter 2.2.2). New artists joining Marvel during the late 1960s, such as Neal Adams, lifted the visuals to an almost photo-realistic level, and Jim Steranko, with a mixture of “Kirby Dynamics”, mixed media, iconoclastic visuals and graphic design (Schumer 2003, 137), showed the further potential of comic book art. As such, comics began to surpass being a children-centric medium to one that spoke to teenagers and college students, since their lives were similarly full of emotional and physical upheaval (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.04 & 1.05). Notable contemporary comic book writer Alan Moore was influenced by this period, particularly in relation to the stories and their creators:

> Stan Lee and his artistic collaborators, the likes of Kirby and Steve Ditko, were transforming the stale, anemic American comics industry with their grittier, darker stories, depth of character, and soap opera melodrama. (cited in Millidge 2011, 24)

The most significant legacy of these Silver Age stories was that, for the first time, superhero stories were not reliant on the war era for stories and influence, and the genre became self-sustaining. In the 1970s (the Bronze Age), comics continued to resonate with an older audience, with the CCA relaxing the Comics Code—which came about through *The Amazing Spider-man* drug awareness issues, published without the CCA logo (Eury 2010, 3-7)—to allow more horror themes to return. Further, a darker approach to heroes emerged, with characters like *Wolverine, Swamp Thing, Ghost Rider, The Punisher, Werewolf by Night, Blade, Son of Satan,* etc. This darker approach carried on into the 1980s and 1990s (more colloquially referred to as the Dark Ages), more notably influenced by the extremes of stories and characterisations introduced by Stan Lee, Jack Kirby and the like, such as *Watchmen* (Moore et al. 1986-1987) and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (Miller et al. 1986). The creators, influenced by the stories of the 1960s of which they were fans, became the future professionals and instigators of the stories and genres of the superheroes. As Harvey confirms “And superheroes with human failings attracted and held—an older audience, and that continuing interest led to direct sale comic shops as well as adult readership” (Harvey 1996, 49).

It is only with the revival of the superheroes by DC and the revolutionary Marvel heroes created during the Silver Age, accompanied with the youth culture movement in America and growing pop culture that the genre became the dominant force in comic books (Raphael & Spurgeon 2003, 155). Contemporary Marvel Comics writer Brian Michael Bendis summarises the current comic book industry mindset: "In the world of comics, if you don't do superheroes, you're alternative" (cited in Roots and Korgon 2004, 17).

Today it seems that superheroes are a product of trying to reach new audiences by easing up on their long-standing past story history, and relaunching new looks, new, "inclusive" and "accessible" continuity (Ching 2015), and stories and characters that cycle and reflect the need to tie in with the latest film and TV incarnation of the characters. While this is a generalisation, my research revealed that, to this day, there is still a conscious effort to pay homage to or play on the more influential stories from past creators. Characters will perpetually be re-imagined depending on the new writer/artist team, and readers exposed to a new incarnation of a character that constantly lives in a state of Act 2, meaning their resolution/end of the story (Act 3) of a traditional 3 act narrative structure, never eventuates:

> [DC Editor] Mike Carlin told me a long time ago that the trick to comics is understanding that there is no beginning, no end, just a middle. Essentially, they're Soap Operas…you'll never see the beginning of a Soap Opera, and unless it's cancelled, you'll never see the end…Basically, your job is to constantly tell 'Act 2'…90% of the marketplace is 'Act 2'. (Kevin Smith cited in Roots and Korgon 2004, 206)

Mainstream comics and superheroes have an almost symbiotic relationship. Without the superhero genre, it is unlikely that mainstream comic book production would have developed in the way that it did, been consumed at the levels that it was in the US (and eventually internationally) during the 1940s war era, the 1960s revival and 1990s direct market boom/speculator period, or still be a current internationally published product, particularly under any other genre. The Big Two—Marvel and DC Comics—dominate much of the western mainstream comic industry and all of its components: the comic book store/direct market sales, the public consciousness (when it comes to comics), and the comic book web media, such as *Bleeding Cool News*, *Comics Alliance*, *Comic Book Resources*, etc.

However, superhero comic sales are, on average, lower than the sales figures from twenty to thirty years ago; The top-selling Marvel Comic superhero event[27] *Secret War* sold around 700,000 copies per issue in the 1980s during the direct market infancy (Dallas 2013, 70), compared to the *Civil War* event in the early 2000s, which in North America averaged 320,000-odd. Though Diamond[28] noted an improvement in sales for superhero comics in the 2010s compared to the early 2000s, the average monthly top comic book sales are around 70,000 to 120,000, compared with issues of Chris Claremont's *Uncanny X-Men*, which sold in the 400,000s in the 1980s (Dallas 2013, 18).

Conversely, companies referred to as second tier publishers such as IDW, Dark Horse, Image, Boom! Studios and Dynamite, are taking a bigger market share than previously by offering alternative genres/stories/series that do not just involve the classic superheroes. In the 1980s, Marvel Comics held up to 70% of the market share (Dallas 2013, 152), whereas they hold around 29-30% now (Siegel 2013). Overall, Marvel and DC Comics hold 60% of the comics market, with the next publisher holding 8% (Image) (Siegel 2013). The other publishers that produce creator-owned/original material or licensed properties, including Image, IDW, Dark Horse, Boom! Studios, Valiant, Dynamite, Avatar, Archie, etc., each claim a small piece of the total market share in the comic book industry today (approx. 40% of dollar share not claimed by Marvel and DC in the American market as on January 2015 (Rapoport 2015)). There are far more publishers in the American market than Australia, publishing a wide range of books for a wider audience internationally.

Despite this, most of the celebrated artists and writers in American comics created and/or worked on superhero titles. These traditional stories and visuals appeal to me as a reader and fan of action/adventure, and as illustrator I have still chosen to narrow my research into focusing on these style of books. There is almost a mythic status given to the characters in superhero books, and there is validity in focusing on the methods of the writers and artists working within these books. Scriptwriting books regarding "The Hero's Journey" narratives that have existed through myths, legends and fairytales confirm that the comic book superhero easily falls into these perennial themes,

[27] Considered the first of what is now the industry-standard norm by Marvel and DC Comics: A multi-part story arc attempting to be the "summer blockbuster films" of comics, generally running over all the titles a company is published, that includes many of the publisher's core characters, and their own respective titles. Hence considered by publisher, creators and readers alike, an *"event"*.
[28] The primary and virtually monopolistic distributor of comic books to stores internationally.

structures and storytelling, which could account for their continual popularity and re-invention for new generations to enjoy (Stucky 2006). As Kaw writes:

> A recurring focus of many mythic stories is the character of the hero and the nature of the obstacles and trials the hero has to overcome, which are often (though not always) the result of the machinations of a villain. This is the simplest and perhaps, most widely appealing of all the monomythic themes. Classical monomyth usually outlines the hero and his adventures. (Kaw 2005)

Part of my attraction to comic books is that it is a medium that allows creators to produce characters and stories with very little start-up costs, or even (given the level of ability, imagination and practice) no formal training. Superhero comics were virtually born from this freedom. Without comics, it is difficult to fathom any at any other time or place, two seventeen-year-olds with no professional training and a low socio-economic background could create something that would not only birth a popular genre by itself, but also become such an international phenomenon. (Indeed, *Superman* went on to make millions of sales in comics, a radio adaptation, high budget (for its time) animated shorts, merchandise, feature films, TV shows, video games, and worldwide fans (Raphael & Spurgeon 2003, 13)). This is just for one character. This level of exposure, birthed initially from superhero comics, can be said about a host of other characters. With cinema technology's current sophistication, the superhero genre is as big and perhaps more relevant than ever before. Though comics in this case are not the primary cause behind this renewed reverence in the genre, it is the comic stories and art that drive the narratives and visuals of the other mediums (Jones 2004, 323, 325-326):

> …The Superheroes were created by two ordinary young fellas from the Midwest. They gave us these tremendous myths that are now internationally known…Here were young people who gave us a myth that I think rivals the classics we have like *Moby Dick*, *Treasure Island*. It may even be greater than that. I think that's a tremendous achievement… (Kirby cited in Morrow 2004a, 131)

The American comic book industry, although comprising many genres and story types (which is growing, purely based on the increasing number of creator-owned projects and independent publishers; Siegel 2013), is still mostly dedicated to the superhero genre (reflected by sales and volume of titles available) (Jones 2004, 330). With characters that have been published for up to seventy-five years, no other medium can boast so many successful re-inventions of their characters over a number of generations (Jones 2004, 338). It is no surprise that the largest entertainment companies in America have purchased the largest publishers of the genre (Time Warner owns DC Comics, and Disney owns Marvel comics) (Comic Book Resources 2009), considering the lack of

reinvention of the characters that have been associated with them (Mickey Mouse with Disney, Looney Tunes with Warner Brothers).

With such a mass mainstreaming of the genre, it is somewhat unusual that comic book sales are not as prolific as they once were. It is unclear whether this has to do with the changes in technology and media entertainment overrunning print in general, the stigma that "comics are just kid's stuff", that something so cheaply mass produced could constitute "art", its association of being "geek" fare or "uncool", or that it, in fact, doesn't appeal to a child audience anymore (due to violence, adult themes, complicated plots).

> Mainstream comics were not designed to be "art". They are a mass-produced commodity mostly employs a utilitarian approach to their creation. (Janson 2003, 62-63)

Despite this perception, the genre has a high level of artistic and creative merit, and is a primary focus of this research. Moreover, since there is still a significant international readership of these products in much more diverse markets and applications, the discussion and creation in the form is worthwhile. Comic books—from the one-shots, through to the graphic novel and ongoing series, books, collections, web comic, motion comic/interactive platforms and works of art—are still a valid and visually engaging art form and storytelling medium outside the confines of time and screen that film and television are restricted to. Comic books have even transcended into the fine art world; for example, Roy Lichtenstein appropriated images from those original artists who drew comic book panels (Childs 2011). Despite the fact that superhero comic are commercially motivated products that need to adhere to set deadlines, their visuals and story form a valid and engaging art medium worthy of research and creation, as writer Greg Rucka confirms: "Sure, it's a superhero comic, but it doesn't mean it's not ART with a capital 'A'" (cited in Root and Kordon 2004, 183).

1.3: Australian Comics: Past and Present

> *Comic books were one of the most popular, and yet most despised, forms of popular culture in Australia. Yet despite their often tumultuous history, the fascinating stories behind comic books in this country have largely gone unrecorded. Overlooked by academics, the history of Australian comics has been largely documented by generations of fans, who have compiled informal histories of comic-book characters, their creators and publishers. Without their tireless efforts, our knowledge of this vibrant medium would be all the poorer.*
> (Second Shore 2013)

Australia's comic book market is far different to the seemingly structured, big business model of the American market. What could be characterised as a cottage industry, due to the small number of creators in Australia actually writing and drawing comics as a full time job, (Arts Hub 2013), Australian comics are the subject of an unofficial debate among readers, students and creators on convention panels, and in private conversation (Beardy and the Geek 2013) on whether the current Australian comics activity is an industry or a scene. Though the overwhelming majority of Australian comic output comes from hobbyists, or creators expressing a creative output separate to their everyday jobs/study, there are some publishers that attempt a more commercial output of works with limited page rates who make notable attempts, and have some success. However, these creators and small boutique style publishers face a somewhat unsustainable environment dominated by American imports, fandom of well-established American characters, no major distribution network, no regularity of locally produced work, commercial advertisement support, major publisher backing of local talent, and cultural differences in the comic book reading habits of children and teenagers growing up.

Generally, the Australian comics market has and continues to be dominated by the American market (Burrows and Stone 1994, 1). There was a period in the early 1940s to late 1950s where, due to World War two, local comics were solidly produced, and a fledgling industry was created due to an embargo on American imports of print material entering the country (Ryan 1979, 154, 158). However, when this embargo was lifted and the large amount of cheap inputs flooded the market again (as well as local printers simply reprinting editions of American content), the comics industry faltered (Ryan 1979, 210). This, along with the heavy public outcry against comic books and its links to juvenile delinquency (much like the senate hearings and outcry in the US during the 1950s), created a stigma against them (hence the despised label mentioned above). What was documented in John Ryan's *Panel by Panel* was a comic scene that has

virtually limped on in waves since (until the book's time of writing in 1979), and the same can be said for its present incarnation.

The Australian comics scene, which could be described as pockets of creators around the country (whether being with an independent publisher, a collective group of like-minded creators or just the solo artist, for instance), persists, experiencing periods of peak and lull periods, and though it seems to be in a state of creative prosperity (thanks to a number of artists and creators of varying abilities producing material on various fronts), Australian comics are still a somewhat invisible art form (Patrick 2010) to the general public. Every so often, an Australian comic manages to slightly pierce the Australian general public consciousness (only if albeit briefly in most cases) thanks to events such as the various pop culture conventions around the country; for instance, Supanova held in six major cities, Oz Comic-Con, and Armageddon Melbourne, the GRAPHIC annual event at the Sydney Opera house, various local government and school initiatives, state library comic-book making workshop initiatives (such as the SLQ Storylab: Comic Workshops in January 2014), Free Comic Book Day events held annually worldwide on the first Saturday of May, and small comic book launches in local communities.

The scene owes partly to the success of higher profile creators producing work not only for the international companies, but also local work. Aside from Frew publications[29], and some book publishers like Allen & Unwin,[30] there are only a handful of independent publishers producing locally made material for an Australian audience, and only a couple reaching audiences outside of the country. In recent years, independent businesses such as Gestalt Publishing have been slowly growing in terms of wider national distribution channels, individual investment of time and money from the co-owners Wolfgang Bylsma and Skye Ogden, small government-subsidised initiatives (Arts Hub 2013) and the profile of their creators (such as Tom Taylor, Colin Wilson, Shaun Tan, Nicola Scott, Christian Read and Andrew Constant). A mid-2013 two-part *Artscape* documentary series produced by the ABC highlighted Gestalt's first foray into the international market via their trip to San Diego Comic-Con in 2011, which helped highlight their existence to a mainstream audience, and supported online sales of their books (Artscape 2013). Their recent deal with pop culture distributor Madman

[29] Apart from one or two instances in the 1950s of producing original material, Frew purely deal with reprinting/repackaging *The Phantom* stories for newsstand consumption.
[30] Allen & Unwin has a graphic novel arm to their company, but tends not to engage in the culture or community of the Australian comics scene.

Entertainment, and a UK-based distributor, for an upcoming animated series based on their book series *The Deep*, and books like *Changing Ways* being translated for the French market, shows promise to an Australian publisher producing Australian comic work (Freya 2013).“Underground” comic-style publisher Milkshadow Books, helmed by James Andre, has also made a distribution deal with Madman in 2013 (Beserk 2013). Further, Black House Comics, a publishing arm of a printing company in Sydney, have a few internationally published creators in their stable (including Marvel/DC/Boom! Studio and prose writer Christopher Sequeira, Artist W. Chew Chan, and Jason Paulos), and have had their titles distributed via Australian newsagents and specialty stores, although have decreased their output in recent years to only a handful of titles and continue to publish graphic novels and prose for convention, bookstore and online consumption. Notably, Black House Comics featured as part of the 2011/2012 Youi Insurance TV campaign where their titles appeared as background features of a comic book store-themed advert, heavily involving the studio work of this thesis (*The Soldier Legacy*) (Giles 2011, Johnston 2011).

Other independent publishers operating in recent years that have been noted by various Australian comics (fan) media and presence include ComicOz, FEC comics, Ashcan comics, and other solo creators who publish sporadically. Most fit the category of solo self-publishers, small groups of like-minded creators and fringe artists, producing anthologies and creator-owned titles that vary in quality from professional (generally by professionals/freelancers working on side-projects between paid work/day jobs) to that produced by novices and amateurs. As Wolfgang Bylsma of Gestalt Publishing notes:

> There are publishers like Milk Shadow Books and Black House Comics, [and] I think we all help to create the impression of their being an Australian industry, but I don’t think we’re established enough to call it an industry yet. There are very few people who are working full time in comics in Australia. (cited in Arts Hub 2013)

Given these characteristics, there are a number of aspects that differentiate the Australian scene from the American market. As opposed to the small businesses and independent publishers that are the larger presence in Australia, in the US, the comics industry is driven by large entertainment companies or internationally distributed publishers. Because of the lack of dominant industry forces and market drive in Australia, there is no dominant genre. Also, apart from the bigger publishers, the majority of books/comics released to the public receive little to no editorial scrutiny. Writers and artists are free to produce material in whatever style or genre they wish, and

whatever message or story they wish to convey to their audience. As a result, the majority of work produced in the Australian scene is more of an artistic endeavour than that that which is attempting to gain/maintain a substantial market share for significant financial gain. Even the production methods between the two countries differ. The early model of the American books was characterised by studios and the "assembly-line" approach—with creators such as Lloyd Jacquet, Eisner & Iger, Harvey etc. that Joe Simon describes in *Joe Simon: My Life in Comics* (Simon 2011)—as opposed to the Australian industry, which employed individual artists to be responsible for the entire production, since Australians were unaware of how the "comic shop" system functioned in New York (Ryan 1979, 158). Seventy years on, this is not unlike the small self-publishers and hobbyists in Australia today. Distribution, traditional forms of marketing, overall budget, and print runs are all areas that suffer from this lack of industry. Furthermore, the audience for Australian comic book material is just as fractured and diverse as the various city and state-based scenes and creators themselves. As one source notes, "Australia's home-grown products since the 1960s have largely been limited to quirky, satirical material, like *Iron Outlaw*, and to a burgeoning range of small, independent titles with low circulations" (Burrows and Stone 1994, 1).

In Australia, the selling of product, production, marketing, and the like, generally falls on the creators of the work. As such, they often speak directly to the fans/audience, not only at the various pop culture conventions around the country (which is essentially the primary channel of exposure and sales for virtually all the publisher/creators on the scene) but also via social media and/or word of mouth. This nature of the scene, and the reduction of print costs as technological advancements improve, also allows virtually anyone to enter the market and, with longevity and an appealing product, grow and maintain a niche audience (provided they are able to afford the costs associated with convention table space, insurance, printing, distribution—e.g. mail outs, and often accommodation and other travel expenses). This can be said for recent Australian independent comic titles such as Craig Bruyn's *From Above* series (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.20), the comic book anthology series *Decay* edited by Darren Koziel (Dark Oz, n.d), *Winter City* series written by Patrick Purcell (Purcell et al., 2013), the anthology series *OI OI OI* edited by Nat Karmichael (ComicOz, n.d) and *Hazard* series written by Victor Hampstead. However, this approach is not always in the interest of producing local content, with many local artists simply being pin up artists; not publishing original work, but producing illustration fan art prints based on licensed properties, and selling

at a limited number. Often this can be more lucrative than the sales of the books themselves, depending on the popularity or the notoriety of the illustrator (and not unlike the American scene, although on a much smaller scale) (McLauchlin 2014). In recent years, there has been a rise in the guest status of more prosperous and popular locally producing creators, who are spotlighted at conventions, along with the international creators and pop culture convention guests (Supanova 2012). Perhaps this is due to the tastes and growing awareness of the Australian comic creators among convention organisers, fellow exhibitors and convention attendees alike (due to the creators either making headway into the American market, or being able to reach a large enough niche with their professional work at the domestic level), or simply an attempt by the organisers to support the local scene. This has been my experience with organisations such as OZ Comic-Con in 2012, 2013, and 2014 (see Appendix 2, Fig 2.24), which have featured a long list of local comic creators, and being a guest of the Supanova pop culture expo in 2012 and 2013 tour in various Australian cities (Supanova 2012).

While the actual selling and distribution of comic books has been an ongoing challenge faced by the scene over the years, again, with technological advances in printing and associated costs, small press print runs have become more affordable. Thus, the onus falls on the creative team (or individual) to produce an appealing product and not only maintain a presence, but also continue to produce. Today, this can be circumvented through crowd funding websites and/or word-of-mouth initiatives, such as Pozibles, Indiegogo, Kickstarter Australia, or web comic releases. Again, the onus is on the creator, often with the help of an extended network of friends, to publicise a project in order to raise funds. If a project is an anthology title, this assists coverage due to the increase in support network per person working on the title. The project is likely to attract "pledgers" if the product has appealing art or theme/story to warrant current purchase and further support (at least enough people to want to read it to get it over the funding line), or a project that gains support because of the profile or track record and previous credits of the artist/s involved[31]. Much like the growth in the American direct market during the 1980s (Dallas 2013, 10-12), this level of reach and distribution allows more local creators to gain exposure for their work, albeit speaking to the

[31] Examples of works produced by local crowd funding in 2012–14 include *The Beginnings Anthology, Sebastian Hawks: Creature Hunter, The Circus, Blow the Cartridge,* Jon Sommariva's Art Book *Osmosis Chills, The Vagabond, The Space Pyrates Collected Edition, Ink Tales anthology, Home Brewed Vampire Bullets #1 anthology, Zombie Cities, Xtreme Champion Tournament, The Vagabond,* and *The Crayfish.*

similar/overlapping audience, which can be at times, disengaged until convention periods. Publisher Baden Kirgan from Black House Comics comments:

> The size of the [Australian] market is the limitation. Comics are surprisingly expensive to produce, with a lot more people involved. You need good volumes to make good money. In a market like America a mid-tier book can sell 10,000–50,000 copies easily, quantities which are just beyond any realistic expectations here. Any publisher here who wants to succeed commercially needs to publish in the US—not necessarily from day one but any business plan that doesn't include US distribution is doomed to fail. (cited in Sandall 2010)

The Australian market does not have the financial presence to support a full-fledged industry. The US is different in that the art form, product (and even the superhero genre) was developed there and is a strong part of the country's culture; the industry was able to flourish and prosper early, particularly during the war era. There was a demand, the supply and financial support to uphold the industry, and in particular to the superhero genre and World War two, 1960s comics were able to become cemented and grow as a section of America's popular culture. This is partly due to the changing trends in audience tastes, the appearance of the teenager as a driving force of the American post-war economy, and the shift in the type of stories and characters that appealed to a college student audience, fighting to be heard and demanding change in society (Howe 2012, 56). The Senate inquiries into the supposed link between comic books and juvenile delinquency in the early 1950s was not enough to eradicate comic books, and the Silver Age of comics bolstered the superhero genre as the dominant genre in the industry since. The comics audiences began to decline by the end of the 1970s, but the direct market and growth of specialty stores allowed companies to distribute and earn money from a different source than the newsstand without having their product returned due to no sales (Dallas 2013, 9). Though comic book audiences in the US have been in steady decline in recent years (perhaps due to the competition with other forms of media and entertainment (video games, the internet etc.), and the dominance of the superhero perhaps not having the same impact as they once did, the top selling comic book series still sell in the millions per year, and are internationally distributed. Also, the genre has had a boost via transmedia adaptations such as animation, live action films, games, merchandise, toys, books and magazine coverage (Pasko 2008, 188).

Thus, Australian superhero comics trying to reach an audience face numerous challenges; not only do they have to directly compete against the generally more professional looking, slick product that is being produced at a regular pace by multi-national companies, but they also have to persuade the average Australian comic reader

to put down their favourite *Batman* and try something local. Thankfully, Australian readers seem to follow a number of titles, with various appreciations among a range of genres. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the scene, its diverse locales, direct-to-the-reader selling (via conventions, mail orders, online), and almost non-existent distribution (often only existing in the form of a consignment basis to a handful of sympathetic stores willing to stock the product), it is virtually impossible to get any accuracy in sales figures. But, from observation, I believe that the top selling titles in Australian comics would likely be in the several hundred, if not more in Gestalt's case. Black House Comics would most certainly have reached a high number with its *Dark Detective: Sherlock Holmes*, *Eeek* and *After the World* titles, purely due to the newsagent distribution. Kirgan confirms "[for] some books we do short runs of 100 or so but the major titles are more than 2000 and less than 50,000" (in Sandall 2010). Gestalt has a number of distribution channels, with Madman opening up the broad market for them earlier in 2012, and a partnership with Turnaround Publisher services, opening up the UK in 2014 (Turnaround 2014, 2). It is difficult to obtain an accurate figure on individual independent title sales, since, typically in the US, the distributors, and not the companies themselves, present this information; hence having no, overall distributor means no source for that information. Many creators are often either unwilling to share this sort of information freely or openly out of fear of degrading the value of the sales they have achieved, or else use the number of sales per unit as a bragging tool. A creator may state they sold out of comic books at a recent convention, but not specify how many books they had to begin with. This information is not available to the public, since often these sales operate through a cash-in-hand mode.

While this segment has stayed in the realms of print, it would be shortsighted to not mention the emergence of the digital market. Though much more dominant in the American industry—particularly with publishers such as Marvel and DC having their own apps for iPads, iPhones etc., digital day and date releases to coincide with the print releases, digital only content—this is certainly something that will have a future impact on the Australian scene in terms of local output. However, unlike companies such as DC, which has their own digital comics division, again the onus in Australia is on the creator/s to investigate a digital conversion of their product/distribution. A number of local creators have released their comics in a PDF file format (made available via their website for cheap download, or via a comic book-based hub for digital downloads, such as Cloud 9, Comixology or Graphically), and although one or two groups in small press

attempt compact disc–only releases of their product, the iPad/iPhone audience has no ability to view the content in this manner. It seems the print book/issue sales outweigh the sales of digital comics produced locally, if only by the fact that the dominant sales model for local books is face to face, and the comic store presence of the item. The irony, too, is that many people accept an American digital product mainly because of its source (For example: DC, Marvel, Image, etc.); however, legitimacy in an Australian product is gained generally when the product exists in a physical form[32]. For example, Gestalt (in conjunction with Big hART) published the *Neomad* interactive iPad comics into book form in 2013.

Working within the scene for a few years, I have noticed that the same trends are emerging in the US. A November 2013 article by ICv2 indicated that digital sales growth (although very strong for the last three years in the US) had slowed, as the graphic novel format sales grew positively for the first time since 2008 (ICv2 2013). This was attributed to the improvement of content of better-selling Marvel and DC collections being made for trade paperbacks (or TPBs), movie and TV tie-ins, programs like *The Walking Dead* and well-written series like Marvel superhero title *Hawkeye*, and Image Comic creator-owned title *Saga*.

This does not mean that the Australian digital products are of a low quality, nevertheless, a number of challenges face the digital platform at present[33]. This includes the unsure environment of the American digital versions (O'Rourke 2012), the distribution/market size of the print comic being as it is on the local scene, and the more successful comic medium at present locally still being the print graphic novel format (as the conventions are still the primary meeting ground for creators and their consumers). The Americans in 2012 had also had independent, digital-only companies start up (such as Madefire), using high-profile comic creators, and still the confusion and unsure nature of reaching a market and actually making money is an uncertain notion. However, this is changing daily, such as Madefire's partnership with DC Comics, IDW, Boom! and Dark Horse, to making digital motion comics. This partnership with the biggest publishers of licensed titles in the US market certainly shows an investment in

[32] For example, *Space Pyrates* from Brisbane creators Mathew Hoddy and Caitlin Major; *Blow the Cartridge* comic strips by Cameron Davis; *The Legend of the Spacelord MoFo* by Pat McNamara and David G. Williams; *Kranburn* by Ben Michael Byrne; *That Bulletproof Kid* by Matt Kyme and Arthur Strickland. These works existed as web comics/webisodes before becoming print/DVD.

[33] Given the volatility of the digital vs. print market, this discussion could be outdated by the time it reaches print.

the concept of digital comics and expanding markets as technology becomes more mainstream and accessible (Ching 2013).

Despite the market for digital comics is reportedly slowing, there is still growth in all three channels of distribution: digital, comic stores, and book channels[34] (ICv2 2013). This is similar in Australia, but on a much smaller scale, primarily due to the cottage industry flavour of the scene here. Many Australian creators, from amateur to professional, are using the digital comic option purely because it is easier to get the product out into the public sphere, considering more and more creators create their work digitally in the first place (or incorporate a digital work hybrid process in their comic making), and the costs associated with printing, postage, and distribution/post are virtually eliminated (Alverson 2012).

A growing range of independent Australian creators have also submitted their work on the digital comic distribution website Comixology[35]. Gestalt also split their graphic novel chapters into single issue downloads, such as *The Deep*, *The Eldritch Kid: Whiskey and Hate* (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.19), and Andrew Constant's *Torn*. The 2013 published *Home Brewed Vampire Bullets #1* promoted their anthology of professional Australian creator works by releasing a digital-only #0 issue, *Sebastian Hawks: Creature Hunter* (by former *Ghostbuster* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* writer Tristan Jones, writer Andrew Constant, and *Hoax Hunters* illustrator Chris Di Bari, based on a character created by *Wolf Creek* director Greg McLean (Gestalt 2014)) released a digital-only short story for the patient supporters of their crowd-funding campaign, and children's comic and graphic novel illustrator Doug Holgate just released online the first installment of *Maralinga 1956* with writer Jen Breech in December 2013 (MacDonald 2013).

New comic books are constantly emerging from different pockets in Australia, with Melbourne being the most active area, from dedicated comics and cartooning studio collectives (For example, Squishface Studio) and creator monthly meet ups. The latter occur in Sydney, Canberra and Brisbane too, but Melbourne boasts a much larger mix of veteran professionals, current professionals, novices, amateurs and Australian comic fans and friends alike, and produces a higher concentration of activity overall. This may be due to a higher concentration of pop culture-related events held there, the city's

[34] At the time of writing this research.
[35] Including Paul Bedford/Henry Pop's *The List* and Matthew Nicholls/Lee Taylor's *Collateral-Dear John*.

artistic culture, and a higher concentration of comic specialty stores that stock more Australian content. Recent events revolving around comics/featuring comics include annual events[36] or frequent periods of local creators, collectives, and friends getting together to launch their next issues of comic books together, usually with the help of local comic book stores such as All Star Comics, and/or promoted by locally based pop culture fan-created podcasts, such as NonCanonical, Whatcha, Behind the Panels, or Nerdculture podcast. These events fit in with the growth in shows in recent years from not only Supanova[37], but also the emergence of OZ Comic-Con[38] and their partnership with ReedPop, the largest producer of pop culture events in the world (New York Comic Con, C2E2, etc.) (Moran 2014). Regional small business shows have also begun to spawn due to the popularity of the big city shows in an effort to cater to fans that travel from regional Australa to attend the larger shows in their home states, or interstate. For example, the emergence of Sugar City Con in Mackay (August 2014) and Tropicon in Carins (2015), and the independent comic book and zine focused Zine and Indie Comic Symposium (ZICS) event in Brisbane, Queensland. This trend reflects the growth in comic shows in the US in 2013 and 2014, both in cities and attendance (Blake 2013).

The Australian scene comprises creators whose goals range from producing comics as a purely artistic pursuit to one of satire, to social commentary, to those attempting to enter the overseas markets, or generate a local publication. At times, it can be an arduous profession without much return, as confirmed by Joe Kubert;

> *Comic Book Artist* [Interviewer]: Comic book creating is a very intensive labour, and oftentimes, the return is not really there for the amount of effort put into it.
>
> Joe Kubert: All true, all true. (Cited in Cooke, Schumer, and Knowles 2002, 20)

Therefore, Australian comic book artists and writers need to seriously consider what drives them to pursue comic books in this environment to begin with.

[36] such as Supanova, OZ Comic-Con, Melbourne Armageddon Expo, Big Arse, Skinny Arse Independent Comic launches.
[37] Launching into Gold Coast, Adelaide and Perth within 2012-2013.
[38] Beginning in Perth, Adelaide and Melbourne in 2012, and launching into Sydney and Brisbane in 2014.

1.4: How Does This General Overview Relate to the Superhero Genre in Australia?

> *Superheroes are very American ... I think Americans are honest and forthright, dreamers and doers.*
>
> —Jack Kirby (Viola cited in Morrow 2004a, 131)

As established in the previous sections, the English-language comic book market is dominated by American creators, companies, and characters, with a seventy-year history of publishing these stories. Comics are essentially an American product with historical and socio-political changes shaping the stories and characters that the creative teams have infused into the books. Australian attempts in the genre have typically been derivatives of popular strips or imitations of established American characters—with sometimes very little separating the visual design or gimmick (the main attribute of the established character, such as *The Flash*, a superhero that can run very fast). This is something that Kevin Patrick alludes to:

> "A lot of them tried to appear as close to their American counterparts in look and feel as possible," Patrick says. "You could almost see that as that 'cultural cringe' mentality. To pass off the Crimson Comet as a popular character, you almost had to erase any trace of his Australian origin." (Kopp 2013)

In the 1940s and 1950s, Australian-produced characters mimicked American superheroes like *Superman* (Ryan 1979, 190), *The Lone Ranger* (Ryan 1979, 184) and *The Phantom* (Ryan 1979, 208). This was common practice of other start up publishers and comic book packaging houses in the US, who were in direct competition with one another[39] (Ryan 1979, 150, and Simon 2011, 104). Australia was no different.

Despite the appearance of some Australian superheroes over the years—with examples as far back as the genre's creation in the late 1930s (Ryan 1979)—even the more regular convention attendants today have virtually no knowledge of them. The Wartime embargo on overseas print material being imported into Australia meant that local content was produced to fill the void. This gave the newsstands here action, western and science fiction heroes in masks such as *Silver Starr, The Lone Avenger, Captain Atom*[40], *Captain Power, The Raven, The Crimson Comet, The Phantom Commando, Captain Justice, Jet Fury, The Phantom Pirate and The Phantom Ranger* (Ryan 1979; Ryan

[39] Notably National periodicals (DC Comics), Timely Comics (Marvel), Fox Publications, Harvey Comics, MLJ publications et al.
[40] At one point, the *Captain Atom* publisher boasted sales of 100,000 copies, and 75,000 members in the "Captain Atom Club" (Ryan 1979, 190).

cited in Burrows and Stone 1994, 26-36) (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.06 – 1.16). Until the imports embargo ended in 1959, the industry was considerably stronger—the newspaper strips more so than the newsstand comics (but this was similar to the US in that the artists considered syndicated newspaper strips a more worthwhile and sought-out artist job than comic books, as indicated by Jack Kirby's early career; see Evanier 2008, 35-43). However, when the embargo was lifted, it became cheaper for local publishers to simply repackage and reprint the American superheroes rather than produce their own work. Since then, there are only a handful of Australian superheroes that are mentioned by historians as being created, with most no longer being produced by publishers after the 1960s (such as *The Panther* and *The Phantom Commando)*. There are however, post 60s periods of superhero comic strip/book examples in isolation. Notably, Gregor MacAlphine and Grahame Rutherford's comic strip *Iron Outlaw* (1970, see Appendix 1 Fig 1.17), Cyclone! Comics (featuring David de Vries and Gary Chaloner's *The Southern Squadron*, and Tad Pietrzykowski's *Dark Nebula)* in the 1980s (a pseudo *X-Men/Justice League International*-style team of heroes that reflected the current American books at the time (Carroll 2002), Phosphorescent comics (*The Watch),* Sequence Comics (*The Borderlander),* and other indie publisher/self-publishing attempts, which unlike some of the aforementioned examples from the 1980s, barely made it past their early issues. Evidence from these works are rarely documented outside of the odd forum or obscure web page, and none of these examples are still in production. From first-hand evidence it seems that very little is currently being published in the superhero genre, at least by the bigger independent publishers. Mostly, obscure superhero books emerge from the sole creators on the scene, with many fading away after a handful of issues or less. The friends and acquaintances who make up the readership of these small run comics keep alive the perseverance of titles such as *Billy: Demon Slayer*, or the more commonly known among Australian creators, *Killeroo*, with only a couple of comic books over a thirteen-year period. However, these types of books are still being produced by aspiring creators, and new independent books continue, as more people seek the desire to either have a little taste of notoriety or local fame, to associate with like-minded people, to see their book on a comic store shelf, or merely for the love and desire to write, draw and make their own comic books and graphic novels.

I have observed that an overwhelming number of previous Australian superhero attempts have followed the model of the old Australian comic heroes of the 1940s and

1950s, mirroring their American counter-parts. Arguably, my work, *The Soldier Legacy*, also slips into this model (or at least is an attempt) of the American pulp heroes of the 1940s, like *The Phantom* (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.21), *The Spirit*, or Timely Comics *The Angel*. But my goal was never to simply stick an Australian flag on a character, or set it in an Australian city. Rather, I wanted to bring the Australian-ness to the forefront of the characters, without the tongue-in-cheek approach, and without being ashamed of any cultural cringe connotations perceived in an Australian hero. Seeing characters in American comic books that supposedly represented Australia but fell short (such as *the Flash* villain *Captain Boomerang* from DC Comics, the Marvel Comic villains *Boomerang* and *The Kangaroo*, the 1940s *Fighting Fool* from *Captain American #13*, or *Rolfe Harrison* from *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #49*) was also a big impetus towards writing and drawing this series of comics. In reading prolific comic book writer Alan Moore's thoughts (cited in Millidge 2011) on the subject regarding American superheroes and their representation of his culture, I found parallels. Alan Moore spoke of the Marvel Comics' UK Division creation of *Captain Britain* being an "uninspired, generic American superhero wrapped in a British flag" (Millidge 2011, 69). When creating a British approach to the superhero for the then published *Warrior* anthology magazine, Alan Moore used a derivative English knock-off of the American superhero *Captain Marvel* to tell unique and innovative superhero stories from his British point of view. Alan Moore said:

> What I wanted to do with *Warrior* was try to create an English approach. With *Marvelman* we had an American superhero, but we set the stories in Britain…with V [*V for Vendetta*], I tried to emphasis the Englishness of it (cited in Millidge 2011, 74)

My aim is to find that unique story/character/spin on the expected, which many independent creators strive for in their creator-owned endeavours:

> ...There is room for original Australian products in the comic book industry, but for it to function at a profit it must be geared to compete in quality at a world level and not merely confine itself to the limited Australian market. (Burrows & Stone 1994, 15-16)

1.5 UK Comics: A Brief Comparison

A detailed history of British (hereafter, UK) comics goes far beyond the scope of this research. However, it is worth touching briefly on aspects of it in relation to the US comic book industry, as some British comic book creators have gone on to play significant roles in the development of US comics, their characters, and the type of storytelling benchmarks that creators strive for. Considering the heritage that Australia shares with the UK, a comparison and discussion between the UK scene and the Australian scene seems warranted too.

The UK comics scene has very similar characteristics to the US and Australian comic book scene, and it is interesting to note the areas where UK comic history and US industry are intertwined. As such, I have chosen to focus on elements that help distinguish a contrast to the Australian scene. Like the US, the UK published comics and comic strips as far back as the late-nineteenth century. Much like the US and Australia, the UK had a Golden Age period of Comic books, and, via publishers, was able to have long-running comic strips, such as *Beano* (1938– present), *Roy of the Rovers* (a football-themed comic started by IPC in 1954), and *the Dandy*[41] (1937–2013) (Stringer 2014). In the 1950s, sci-fi superhero-esque action adventure became popular in the UK, with British character *Dan Dare* being created in the pages of Eagle comics (BBC 2014). Stable publishers allowed for work to develop and reach UK audiences better than in Australia, and it seems like comic reading was a more ingrained part of culture and growing up than in Australia as well. Reprints of American comics were produced in country, and, although imports of US comic titles affected the original British characters, such as *Dan Dare* (which declined in readership against the US imports, and ceased to be published in 1970), the UK seemed to have a more steadfast operation than the reprints in Australia. Furthermore, the strong publishing of independent comics helped to bolster British talent and characters that eventually made their way to the US, another element that Australia did not have.

The 1970s to 1980s was an important period for UK comics, despite the erratic nature of the market, particularly in the late 1970s, when trade union strikes and adverse weather affected distribution, especially of the once highly successful Marvel UK reprint titles (Wymann 2015c). The independent scene seems to have driven the early success of British comics, with anthology-style books (such as *2000AD* and *Warrior* in

[41] *The Dandy* is said to hold the record as the world's longest-running comic strip (Stringer 2014).

the 1980s) allowing writers, such as Alan Moore and Grant Morrison, and artists, such as Dave Gibbons, Steve Dillon and Brian Bolland, to publish their early work (Wymann 2015c). UK comic book talents seemed to have the opportunity to develop with a strong connection to the American industry. In turn, the American industry accessed the UK talent pool, particularly after the success of Alan Moore's tenure at DC Comics, which began with writing *Swamp Thing* in 1984 under editor and original creator Len Wein (Dallas 2013, 125).

Marvel UK had been established in 1972 as the first body to develop reprint material via weekly anthology-style books, with the occasional new cover or splash page. Beginning with *The Mighty World of Marvel #1* in September 1972, the reprints of Marvel UK superhero books were initially very popular, with only a handful of titles dropping in and out of the schedule at certain times. The popularity stemmed from the fact that the reprints, although not necessarily in colour, were printed on better quality paper than the typical British newsstand comic book, and had glossy covers. Because the magazines were directly produced under the supervision of Marvel itself, the legitimacy bore more weight than previous reprint-licensed holders (Wymann 2015a). It is interesting to compare this with the Australian reprints by Transworld Feature Syndicate/Newton Comics (followed by Page publications) (Patrick 2006), which were far more haphazard in the continuity of issues, colour changes to original Marvel covers, and did not have the added advantage of being produced as an arm of the Marvel brand itself (Best 2006).

However, by 1976/1977, Marvel UK found that reprint material was running out, and, coupled with the problem of Marvel US facing difficulties regarding newsstand sales and the economic troubles of the UK, this translated into sales downturns, merged books, and haphazardly scheduled issues (which irritated loyal readers). Marvel UK was given a new editorial team, which introduced an attempted British-based superhero. However, like the characters in the Australian scene during the 1950s (see Chapter 1.4), the character Marvel developed was essentially an American archetype for an English audience. Chris Claremont (an English-born writer, but a US citizen), whose work was extremely influential on the *X-men* title (which he wrote for 17 years), was the writer on *Captain Britain #1* (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.22). Although there was an attempt to inject "Britishness" into the character and story of this comic book, it was essentially an American style hero, produced in the US, with a character based in "London", with very

little visually or conceptually that related to the UK at all (Wymann 2015b). Herb Trimpe, an artist on the series, did not see the merit of the concept:

> …I thought it was a stupid idea in the sense that I didn't believe that a superhero could be popular in England. Superheroes leave you with a very distinct cultural impression: very American, very strong, very much fly-in-your-face… (As cited in Wymann 2015b)

While British war comics were quite popular at the time (1977), another lack of understanding of British sentiments was shown by the US company when they attempted to reach the British comic market with *Sgt. Fury* reprints (a Jack Kirby/Stan Lee action-packed World War Two title from 1963):

> British war comics at the time were characterized by a highly British (and unashamedly nationalistic) storytelling focus, which very often featured the "Tommy spirit" as its recurring theme: British officers and soldiers caught up in seemingly hopeless situations but who eventually managed to turn the tables on their adversaries thanks to their bravery and wit. This was a completely different type of plot compared to *Sgt. Fury* who would literally blast his way through any kind of problem…(Wymann 2015b)

Captain Britain lasted until the end of 1977, but was integrated into the Marvel universe in 1978 in the US. To try and curb the sales downturn, the problem with issue scheduling and the affect it had on US colour imports (and, ultimately, the irritation of Marvel UK readers) (Wymann 2015c), Stan Lee reportedly hired Derek (Dez) Skinn, editor for *UK Mad Magazine* and *House of Hammer.* Skinn was able to make a number of changes to Marvel UK to help stem the downturn, by acquiring the third-party license to publish *Doctor Who* comics, based on the long-running popular British science-fiction TV series from the BBC. Skinn also considered the format of the reprints and reduced the quality of the cover and paper to better blend in with the production format of other British comics on the newsstands, thinking that perhaps the readers felt the Marvel UK books looked too different. Skinn also launched a number of magazines produced in-house, beginning with *Hulk Magazine* (1979), which featured original material from British creators such as Dave Gibbons and Steve Dillon. Alan Moore had also produced some early original work for Marvel UK, on a newly revived *Captain Britain*. Under Skinn, Marvel UK introduced the original masked pulp characters *Night-Raven* (1979), who had featured in the *Hulk Magazine* as a back-up story drawn by

David Lloyd (Skinn 2011). According to David Lloyd, this character partly influenced the vigilante *V* from *V For Vendetta* (discussed in more detail below). Dez Skinn left Marvel UK in 1981, after a couple of years as editor, to begin his own comic book publishing arm with Quality Communications (Skinn 2015). In the mid-1990s, the Marvel comics reprint license went to an Italian publisher, Panini, which still provides both reprint and original content for UK and European markets (ICv2 2006).

Back in the 1940s, publisher L. Miller and Son were reprinting Fawcett Comic's American comic book series *Captain Marvel* until 1954, when National (DC Comics) won a court case against Fawcett for plagiarism of *Superman*, shutting down their production of the reprint material. Mike Anglo, whose studio produced original British comics strips for L. Miller and Son, simply created the character *Marvelman* (Dallas 2013) and continued to make stories until the late 1960s. The character was revived in *Warrior* magazine by Alan Moore in the early 1980s (as mentioned in Chapter 1.4), and worked on by creators such as Neil Gaiman and Alan Davis. The strip, although featuring an American character, touched on British sentiments, and pushed the boundaries of the American superhero narrative and comic visuals.

Warrior (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.23) was one of a number of comic anthologies that emerged in the UK from independent creators, in serialised magazine formats, that fostered a number of creators that American publishers like DC Comics began to respond to. Alan Moore was said to have instigated what was considered to be the "UK Invasion" in the 1980s (Pasko 2008, 178), with British writers and illustrators having their work exposed to the direct American comic market, and editors like Karen Berger and Dick Giordano of DC Comics bringing more writers over from the UK (such as Grant Morrison, Neil Gaiman and Pete Milligan to work on revitalising obscure DC comic heroes, such as Morrison's ongoing *Animal Man* series and Gaiman's three issue *Black Orchid*; Salisbury 1999) via active recruiting. *Warrior* also originally published Alan Moore and David Lloyd's highly praised *V For Vendetta* (Gravett 2014, 448), a dystopian future science-fiction political tale, set in a totalitarian Britain, and featuring the vigilante anarchist *V*, modelled off the appearance of the British historical figure Guy Fawkes (Neal & Hoare 2014). The series was eventually acquired by DC comics, and published in full, beginning in 1988 (including the final chapters that did not feature in *Warrior* due to its cancellation in 1984; Dallas 2013). *V For Vendetta* (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.24) was another example of US publishers gaining rights to reprint British material, such as *Miracleman* (the new name given to *Marvelman* by Derek Skinn after

legal issues with Marvel Comics), which was licensed by Quality Communications (the publisher of *Warrior)* to be published by Eclipse Comics (Dallas 2013, 148). This led to Alan Moore writing more issues that pushed the boundaries of storytelling and subject matter not seen in superhero comics at the time, such as *Miracleman #9* (1986), which featured the graphic depiction of childbirth (Dallas 2013). The *Miracleman* character lived on after Alan Moore left the series and gave his ownership of the character to Neil Gaiman (Dallas 2013), who continued writing the series. Despite legal issues that arose in the 1990s, as of 2014, Marvel Comics has begun reprinting the original Eclipse Comic issues for the first time in twenty years, allowing Neil Gaiman to continue with his unfinished stories, and even printing Grant Morrison's "lost" issue (Schedeen 2014).

Another major feature of the British comic industry was the action/adventure/science-fiction anthology series *2000AD.* It was first published in 1977 by IPC Magazines, and soon rose to be a British staple in regards to their comics industry, and the biggest of the British anthologies (*Grant Morrison: Talking with Gods* 2010), with work by virtually every influential British comic book writer and artist working in the US appearing in the publication at some time or another (among them Alan Moore, Mark Millar, Garth Ennis, Mick McMahon, Frank Quietly, John Higgins and Grant Morrison; 2000AD 2014). The publication even inspired and taught future influential comic writers such as Warren Ellis and Garth Ennis on how to write comics, with an issue of *2000AD Annual 1981*, which had a section on the comic making process, including a John Wagner/Alan Davis *Judge Dredd* script (Salisbury 1999). One of the biggest legacies of the long-running anthology series was the British-created character *Judge Dredd*, who has gone on to feature in his own magazines, comics, video games and two Hollywood live-action films (1995 and 2012). Another was the Dave Gibbons co-creation *Rogue Trooper* (with Gerry Finley-Day) , who, like *Judge Dredd,* has been licensed to American publisher IDW to reprint British material and produce new material for the US market (IDW Publishing 2012; Keily 2013). Another original British creation featured in the pages of *2000AD* over the years was Grant Morrison's British superhero character *Zenith*, which impressed DC Comics enough for them to want Morrison to pitch to write for them (Dallas 2013).

Characters such as *Miracleman, Judge Dredd,* and *Rogue Trooper* are examples of the British action/adventure characters that were exported to the US, but Alan Moore's character *John Constantine*, who was developed in the US by British creators, proved to be one of the most long-lasting and enduring characters of comics, film (2004) and TV

adaptation (2014–2015). *John Constantine* (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.25), a British "working class mystic" (Dallas 2013, 137) based on the likeness of British musician Sting, first appeared in the early 1980s in DC Comics's revived *Swamp Thing* series. This is worth mentioning not only because a British character was developed by the writing and artwork of British creators, within the context of UK political atmosphere and culture (with the trend continuing over the years of the character's development and stories in the 1987 *Hellblazer* series[42]), but because it is so far opposed to the previously mentioned Australian characters to feature in US comics, which are, like the original *Captain Britain* creation, a shallow depiction of Australian culture/characteristics, and were not developed by Australian creators.

Alan Moore, through his influential work on *Saga of the Swamp Thing* (1984), *Watchmen* (1987, with Dave Gibbons and John Higgins), *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988, with Brian Bolland and John Higgins) and *V For Vendetta* (1982, with David Lloyd), led the way for creators such as Dave Gibbons, Brian Bolland, John Higgins, Grant Morrison, Alan Grant, Peter Milligan, Jaime Delano, Alan Davis and Steve Dillon to establish a foothold in American comics, boosted by their work in Britain on anthologies such as *2000AD* or other independent work. Further acclaimed work such as Grant Morrison's writing on *Animal Man* (1988), *Arkham Asylum* (1989, with Dave McKean) and *Doom Patrol* (1989), Neil Gaiman on *Black Orchid* (1988) and *Sandman* (1989), and Jamie Delano's strong British influences into the *Hellblazer* (1988) series, encouraged further UK recruitment, which also led to Karen Berger beginning the DC Comics alternative comics imprint, Vertigo, in 1993. British creators such as Warren Ellis, Garth Ennis, Rachel Pollack, Paul Jenkins, Frank Quitely, Mark Millar and Bryan Hitch were able to foster their talents in writing/drawing, and incorporate their British sentiments of class, punk, notions of authority into their interpretation on the established American ideologies inherent in the superheroes, assisted by their works in the UK, and their working relationships with their fellow countrymen.

Magazines like *2000AD* became the British creator's "resume" (Salisbury 1999) acting as an audition of sorts into the US market, giving the two markets an almost symbiotic relationship, considering the properties and franchises that have developed from these comic creators. The strength of the UK comics scene history is also a result of secure publishers/publishing ventures, and, although licenses/ownership have changed hands

[42] *Hellblazer* is the spin-off series featuring *John Constantine* from *Saga of the Swamp Thing* (first appearing in 1985) (Neal & Hoare 2014).

over the years,[43] writers and artists who have challenged the boundaries of characters and storytelling have managed to forge ahead and work not only within the US market comic methodology, but also shape it, without necessarily losing the British sentiments or touches to their work. This can be said even for strips that feature American characters, such as *Miracleman* and *Judge Dredd*.

Though not as big as the US market, the UK comic book market still fares much better than the Australian one. Again, this is because of publishing imprints run by larger companies, with larger distribution networks and a bigger audience. The proximity of the European countries also helps the UK market, considering companies such as Panini are producing reprint material of US products for the UK, and large companies such as Titan Books (under the Titan Entertainment group, which also owns the Forbidden Planet franchise chain of book and comic book stores across the UK, Ireland and the US) are printing original British creator-owned comic material (monthly series), and have licensed tie-ins such as *Doctor Who,* Dreamwork's film tie-ins such as *Penguins of Madagascar*, and licensed digital-to-print rights for some of the US digital comic company Madefire titles, such as *Cap Stone,* and *Mono* (Titan Comics 2015). Titan comics are also distributed to the direct comic market by Diamond, and their range of books is distributed by Random House. There is no Australian equivalent comic to this.

It is also worth mentioning that comics of British and American sentiments are also being produced as part of Scottish-born Mark Millar's imprint Millarworld, which publishes a range of action and superhero genre mini-series that are co-created and drawn by artists who are renowned for their comic book illustrating in the US, such as John Romita Jr. (*Kick-Ass* 2010, and sequels), Dave Gibbons (*Kingsmen: The Secret Service* 2014), Lenil Francis Yu (*Superior* 2010), and Sean Gordon Murphy (*Chrononauts* 2015) (Millarworld 2015). Another *2000AD* alumnus, Mark Miller began writing under a partnership with Grant Morrison (Salisbury 1999) on DC Comic projects (from 1994) and then Marvel properties from the early 2000s. Mark Millar launched his own creator imprint in the mid-2000s, with creator-owned titles with different publishers. Millarworld lists twelve creator-owned properties in the action and superhero genres, with several existing as Hollywood films, including *Kick-Ass, Kick-Ass 2* and *Kingsman: The Secret Service*. These are also joint British-American made films under British production company *Marv Films* (Millar 2010).

[43] Such as *2000AD* being published by Fleetway in the 1990s and Rebellion in the 2010s (2000AD 2014).

It is difficult to say whether Australia is experiencing a slower, smaller version of the "British invasion" (Dallas 2013, 237), with creators such as Tom Taylor, Nicola Scott, Tristan Jones and Mark Sexton working on some of the largest properties in US comics. It is interesting that Jones and Sexton are, at the time of writing, both working on the DC/Vertigo licensed comic/movie tie-in of the film property *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), an Australian character created and directed by Australian filmmaker George Miller. For genre properties, this stands as Australia's only export to be adapted into a US action comic. But really, a British-style recruitment of the 1980s would have to involve similar parameters that existed in the UK during that time, which is not the case today; that is, a large-scale and active recruitment by the larger international companies for Australian creators and properties. There is no equivalent for the full *2000AD* model,[44] nor the infrastructure or support that exists or did exist in the UK market. The closest anthology in Australian in the 1980s and early 1990s would have been the aforementioned *Cyclone!/Southern Squadron* comic series, and, according to David De Vries, apparently, the creators did make some headway with the Australian newsstand, though not at the numbers of the US or the UK markets(Carroll 2002). Despite the UK comics' market downturn in the 1980s, *2000AD* was selling 100,000 copies per week (Bishop 2014), a fraction of the 10,000 copies that were distributed for *Cyclone!* Though this led to discussions and some work with US publishers for the creators of the book, there seems to be no mention of any follow on after period of only a few years of the titles being produced (Carroll 2012). Sadly, it can also be said that the means by which the calibre of writers and artists able to get their work seen by the right people, or given the appropriate time, money and output would perhaps play a part too in this instance. Independent publishers such as Gestalt, which have actively been seeking inroads into the US and UK markets, with an editorial eye on recruitment and a focus on writing and drawing good stories, might present an appropriate approach.

I do not believe that a collective "Australian invasion" is possible, particularly in the present climate of US comics. However, I do believe that Australian individuals can have success in the comic book industry. The right course of action involves understanding and applying the methodologies used by prominent creators to create strong characters and stories; learning, assessing and reapplying methods; building a

[44] There are anthologies that aim to mimic the sci-fi/action comic package that the *2000AD* magazine entails, such as *Terra Magazine* (2012) and *Melbourne Comic Quarterly* (2015), but these are self-published, and thus lack the support of a large publishing company, market sustainability, output (weekly versus quarterly/yearly) distribution, or the calibre of creators like John Wagner, Alan Moore, Grant Morrison, etc.

folio of work under larger publishers (a profile, credits); and approaching the right people. From a story and character perspective, this seems to be possible without having to eradicate "Australianness" from one's work; rather, it is being conscious of universal appeal. As George Miller states on his character *Mad Max*:

> He's a classic archetype recognized around the world. He's that lone gunman wandering the western landscape, or that lone samurai, or a viking wandering a wasteland in search of some meaning…He's a universal character across many cultures. (cited in Tucker 2015)

Chapter 2: The Process/Method of American Comic Book Storytellers

> *To separate the comic book writer from the comic book artist in a discussion of the medium is to miss the dimension of exchange inherent in comic book production.*
>
> (Klock 2002, 15)

The current production processes used by mainstream superhero comics still largely adheres to many of the original processes first set out in the genre's birth, despite technological changes to methods and increased production quality. The core defined functions of writer, penciller, inker, colourist, letterer and editor still exist. While there are exceptions to this, such as a penciller who inks their own work, a writer/penciller role etc., this is still a rarity for the monthly released books, due to the tight deadlines and demand for regular scheduled books. Nevertheless, "The opportunity to create good art in this environment is challenging but not impossible, even with a traditional assembly line approach" (Janson 2003, 63).

To document every stage of the comic page-creating process in great detail would be outside the parameters of this research. So too would it be to mention every current or past writer or artist in comics. However, my goal has been to research and delineate the aspects of the methods in the process that relate most to how my studio work was produced[45], so that others can read the process, and consider their own choices when attempting to create their work. This is an aspect of Australian comics rarely documented on, particularly in regards to the genre of choice discussed in this thesis. Though writing and pencilling are strongly needed to re-enforce the storytelling function of the visuals and words, I only briefly mention these last stages of the comic-book process, and only in a sense of my individual approach to the studio work, rather than a more comprehensive view. But their absence in wordy chapters by no means diminishes their importance to the process, as the next chapters will attest to.

In the following sections, I outline the various roles and steps in the production process in a somewhat chronological fashion. It might be surprising to some how many people are involved in creating a comic book, and the kinds of considerations, exchange and collaboration needed. Briefly, the team is comprised as follows:

[45] Working solo on *The Soldier Legacy*, collaboratively with writer Christopher Sequeira on *The Dark Detective: Sherlock Holmes* (on the backup story and layouts) and *The Soldier Legacy's Strange Tales #1*, and working with writer Tony Babinski on *The New Adventures of The Human Fly* #1.

- The editor (or editorial team), who has assembled the writer/artists together for a particular issue, and have approved the writer's pitch/direction to take the story, offering notes, story alternatives/improvements, and advice in general pertaining to story structure. The pitch process by the writer can start from a sentence, and build up back and forth between each pass/correspondence with the editor (from sentence, to synopsis/paragraph, to outline, to eventually a script).

- The writer, who has written the story the reader is seeing/reading (via a script the reader never sees, or from a conversation/notes to an artist the reader never hears).

- The penciller, (or artist) who breaks down the page into the visual interpretation of the writer's story, drawing the illustrations. Then, whether digitally or traditionally (or both), they eventually rough sketch the work at a large scale, and clean up the lines etc. for the final pencilled work. The penciller needs to understand the language of visual storytelling, including skills such perspective, composition, anatomy (Janson 2002, 10). Unless the pencils are maintained for the particular story and/or art style of the artist, or the intention of the book, the reader does not see the pencil lines in their pure or original form (Lee & Buscema 1978, 145).

- The inker, who delineates the pencil lines, giving heightened depth, line weight, light source etc., due to the dark black nature of ink as opposed to the soft greys of graphite (or blue line, depending on the artist) pencil line. The inked line emphasises the storytelling clarity of the images (Lee & Buscema 1978, 148).

- The colourist, who enhances the artwork by adding colour; in modern superhero books, this is done digitally (in the past, this was hand applied, using the colour separating process for printing instructions; colour was restricted by a limited colour palette due to four-colour printing methods). The colour re-enforces the lighting and shade areas (commonly) dictated by the penciller and emphasised by the inked lines. Despite being the last process in the pure visual aspect of the page, it is the element that tends to catch the eye first. As colourist Mark Chiarello states, "It is the colourist's job to enhance the importance of the right details within the context of the story" (Talon 2007, 183).

- The letterer adds word balloons, thought balloons (if applicable), caption boxes, and sound effects to the completed pages. Contemporary superhero books do this digitally on the completed page, and usually the writer returns at this stage (or at least

after receiving the completed black-and-white pages from the penciller/inker) and adjusts the script based on the visuals presented. Writer Brian Michael Bendis indicates that he has omitted word balloons on occasions, as he believed the images the artists provided spoke for themselves (Bendis, 2012). Before the advent of digital application, lettering was done as early as the pencilling stage. The penciller, being the one composing the panel visuals, would allow for the speech balloons when thumbnailing/roughing the page. Or at least allow for space. The letters were by typically inked and complete before arriving at the inker, who would ink the rest of the page. In contemporary comics, the letterer's job is generally last, and yet, just as important to the visual flow of the page. The letters could be said as one of the first elements a reader looks at on a page. Former DC Comics artist/editor Dick Giordano states:

> When the reader sees a white oval surrounded by colour and tone, the eye immediately searches out the next oval in succession. This is how a comic story is read. (cited in Talon 2007, 74)

The above is a simplified description of the production process—obviously, there is more involved, in a sense of the production department scanning pages, assembling pages, publishing details etc.—but my aim is to highlight is the major aspects of storytelling/creating as completed by the various roles in the process. I will now describe these roles in more detail.

2.1: The Editor

> *A great editor can help realize an idea; a terrible editor can help destroy it. It's purely a matter of the editor's confidence and talent, which can range from amazing to horrendous. But I feel I do my best work when left to wander on my own, with few exceptions.*
>
> (Gail Simone, e-mail message to author, 1 December 2011)

Editors are crucial to professional comics. While, as previously mentioned, there are only a few working in the Australian scene (but many writers/artists will seek editorial guidance before releasing a story to print), in the American scene, they essentially manage the work which is produced , and decide what will be produced (Arrant 2012). In American comics, nothing is printed without the approval of the editor. Much like film editing, a good comics editor is invisible, in that their contribution is overshadowed by the writer and artist/s on the final work, but this is where the shared namesake similarities end. A comic book editor is often a senior-level person, who finds or

assembles the creative team on a title, who offers ideas/suggestions to writers (and artists) (Wickline 2013), and who ensures the work is completed on schedule. The editor's role in approaching this is much like the creatives on the comic; up to the individual. While the editor is mindful of artistic concerns, they also prioritise economic concerns. The editor's job is typically to maintain the overall company's wishes in respects to the final product reflecting what the company wishes to convey in quality, vision, and, in the case of long-running character proprieties, the status quo (Wickline 2013). All of this, of course, needs to be completed on a deadline; as Madefire and former DC Comics senior editor Ben Abernathy states, "The way I see it, the main role of an editor, like with print, is pushing to deliver the best story possible in a timely fashion" (cited in Arrant, 2012).

Any modern superhero comic from either DC Comics or Marvel will likely be overseen by a large editorial office on behalf of the publisher. The most senior roles are the publisher/s, the editor in chief or the entire publishing line, followed by the editorial offices, which are divided according to the business function they perform (e.g., collected editions editors, digital/online etc.), or the stories that they write. Characters of superhero storylines are generally managed by a particular senior level editor, who is responsible for any number of books featuring their portion of characters. Characters can be separated into various offices by whom they interact with (regular team ups of heroes, their individual rogue galleries etc.), sub genres (fantasy/supernatural characters, team books etc.), or even the popularity of a character based on sales ((for example, Nick Lowe's appointment to the *Spider-man* books in 2014 (MacDonald 2014)). The senior editor is supported by assistant editors and/or associate editors, who will help an office by taking on a character title/s under that main office, and help them co-ordinate the storylines/story arcs being produced by the creative team. This complex system has the broad goal of producing comics that an audience will buy and continue to buy. Senior editors have said in this regard:

> Our job comes down to being advocates and caretakers for projects and characters…both inside the company and outside the company. (Marvel editor Steve Wacker cited in O'Keefe 2012)

> If you're writing Superman, you're not going to be given 'carte blanche', because it's somebody else's reality that you're playing with—it's been somebody else's for 60 years, and you are, hopefully, perpetuating and strengthening what that universe is all about. But something that's creator-owned where an editor is there solely as an advisor—there's tons of leeway and freedom. (DC Comics editor Mike Carlin cited in Root and Kordon 2004, 17)

The rise in creator-owned titles over the years in periods where the comics industry has shown alternative distribution means (such as the emergence of the direct market in the 1980s, the establishment and rise of Image Comics in the 1990s, the internet/digital comic market, the crowd funding website model) has changed the way in which creators attempt to get their story out into the public (Means-Shannon 2012). It has also changed the options for creators working for companies, where the alternative publishers seem to have homes for creator-owned properties. Whether they are Marvel/DC or not does not seem to hinder their success; take *The Walking Dead* or *Saga* for instance (ICv2 2013) Writer Paul Jenkins has commented on the lack of "creative freedom" (ICv2, June 2013) he experienced in his recent dealings with DC, where he feels superhero books are being "destroyed by editorial interference perpetrated by unqualified project managers" (ICv2, June 2013). Other high-profile writers and artists in particular have also "chaffed" (ICv2, June 2013) under the corporate-owned editorialship of DC Comics and Marvel, which have become increasingly like caretakers of licensed properties, rather than allowing the creators to tell their stories. The US industry websites such as Bleeding Cool News (Wickline 2013) and ICv2 (ICv2 2013) have reported a number of high-profile departures and confrontations where editors and creators have not agreed on creative decisions. This may affect the trend of superhero comic books in the future, and where creators take their work: alternative publishers, digital or otherwise:

> It's hard to shake the thought that the corporate ownership of the Big Two, and the stakes of the game now that their parents are making comic-based movies that cost medium-sized nine-figure numbers (Man of Steel reportedly cost $375 million to make, distribute, and market worldwide), may be fundamentally altering the kinds of comics they make and how they relate to the people that make them. (ICv2, June 2013)

For Australian creators working with an independent publisher, the hierarchy is much simpler than that of the American publishers, and it is also uncommon that a creator here is working with a long established, continuity-laden property. In fact, apart from Gestalt, which does have a dedicated editor – in – chief and editor, the larger groups have the publisher to act as editor[46] (Black House Comics: Baden Kirgan, MilkShadow: James Andre etc.). Considering the frequency/publishing deadlines for each issue of every Marvel or DC Comics title under their supervision, as well as meetings, submissions etc., the workload of the editors is indisputable, and it is no wonder that

[46] Though Gestalt publisher Wolfgang Bylsma also acts as Editor-in-Chief, with Gary Edwards also operating as an editor on some of Gestalt's books.

there are a number of editors within an office. The overall output of the Australian scene is far less than the industry overseas, which, as previously stated, is due to the relative size, economic structure (or lack thereof) of the comic market here. This thesis is not aimed at speculating how to solve the problems, but I do acknowledge that economic supply and demand plays a huge role in professional attempts of output here. Aside from cultural perceptions, this ultimately impacts on the work structure and output of the final product in Australia. The artists and writers of Australian comics tend to have complete freedom over creative decisions on their final comic book work. Thus, while the editor in the American comic process plays an important role in what finally appears on the page, in Australia, this role is virtually nonexistent and a solo artist/writer here produces their work without that restraint, or professional safety net. In one sense, this can work in a creator's favour, as the focus on the work is perhaps different to that of a creator working for a big company, with an editor that needs to take into account marketing policies and corporate style, as Will Eisner (2007) suggests:

> One of the reasons *The Spirit* was an innovative as it was, was the fact that I had the freedom to innovate. You've got to remember too that I was in a different market structure than the fellows who were working at Marvel or DC or across town or one of the other major comic book houses. There the marketplace, the copy sales dominate the editor's judgment. Judgment on the story was predicated on the number of copies that were sold is what I'm trying to say…(Will Eisner cited in Talon 2007, 192)

When independent and solo publishers do not have dedicated editor, in their place is usually a project manager or instigator of an anthology book, or perhaps a like-minded creator, a sought-out mentor (professional or otherwise), local comic group collective, someone to proof read, etc. But this role is at the discretion of the individual/collective. Having observed the small/independent press scene in the US (after attending the San Diego Comic-Con), I feel this is no different there, and I believe it is important to emphasise to future comic creating professionals that they may not have direct access to an editor in their work environment. This could account for the range of output quality across Australian comics. Joe Kubert asserts how beneficial an editor can be to the comic-making process, which highlights what might be lacking in some Australian comics, superhero or otherwise:

> The guy I was really learning from at that time was, of course, Shelly Mayer. He was one of my mentors. He was a true editor. Most of the young editors I find today are more traffic managers than traditional editors...But Shelly would sit with me and say, "Well, if you did this to the character, he would look more like

> the character should." Or, "A young person looks this way in proportion to this and that." He was terrific... (cited in Cooke, Schumer, and Knowles 2002, 25)

I believe the Australian comic creator, in lieu of an editor, should at least seek professional feedback on their work, which is something I strived to do with each issue release. I was also privileged in a sense to have met like-minded professionals, from whom I was able to seek feedback, before and after the production process, such as Christopher Sequeira (writer on such comic books as *Astonishing Tales: Ironman*, *X-men vs. Vampires* for Marvel Comics, *Justice League Adventures* for DC Comics, and *Dark Detective: Sherlock Holmes* for Black House Comics) and Wai Chew Chan (artist on *Astonishing Tales: Ironman*, *Cthulu Tales* for Boom!, *Dark Detective: Sherlock Holmes*, and storyboards for films such as *Happy Feet* and *Superman Returns*). Though the audience may not recognise the nuances an illustrator is trying to achieve in telling the story in the comic book, the professionals will notice what is lacking if the attempt is not made to improve and grow.

2.2: Writing

2.2.1: Full Script

> *Writing a comic script is an exercise in telling a story in pictures. The majority of comics today are written full-script method: the writer breaks down the story into pages, and the pages into individual panels. Part of the writer's job is to come up with, at least in the writer's mind, the most visual way to tell the story, and then offer that up to the artist. It's a particular skill, demanding visual and pacing sensibilities that make writing comics harder than either prose or screenplays.*
>
> (Marz 2013)

When writing for comics, whether a collaborative or a solo project, the methodology tends to fall into two approaches: Full-script or Plot driven (the latter is commonly referred to as the "Marvel Method" (Salisbury 1999, 9)). The full-script method is writer-driven storytelling. In this instance, the writer of the comic story writes a page-by-page, panel-by-panel account of the comic book, with full descriptions and dialogue for the artist to follow. The writer is the one who judges how many panels per page the story needs. Research has shown that this method contains gradations based on the way the writer writes his/her script. Essentially though, the full script allows the writer full control of the story as they dictate the pacing and the plot elements that occur on each page of the comic book (O'Neil 2001, 28).

Unlike film scripts, there is no dominant format or way a comic book writer completes his or her script; the writing process is as individual as the writers themselves. Also, not only the individual preference of the writer in writing the visuals for the story up to the writer, but also their variations on their writing changes based on the artist they are working with. For example, comic book writer Brian Michael Bendis confirms that, if he knows he is working with a seasoned penciller, he leaves some of the storytelling elements for the artist to decide on. A tighter script, which is one that contains more explanation as to what the writer intends for each panel breakdown, is more appropriate for an artist with perhaps lesser experience in comic book storytelling. Joe Kubert (2013) discusses writer Bob Kanigher's script style for his work on Sgt. Rock at DC Comics, a company that is noted as predominately full-script users:

> …Once he gave me a 12-page story written on one sheet of paper, which he'd written on his lunch hour, which he did often. He was so in tune with what I could do that he was able to describe in just two or three words a whole page of what I had to do. He allowed me to break down - which he never allowed any of the other artists to do - add, panels, combine panels where I felt the flow would work better. That kind of freedom I appreciated very much, because it allowed me to change what I wanted…With the other guys, it was much more specific when they described the panels and the action was taking place, so I was locked in a lot more with the other scripts that I received. That's about the big difference. (cited in Levitz 2013, 10)

Apart from the dialogue—which is often tweaked and revised before being lettered to a comic page (Bendis 2012)—the script is a major part of the art form that is not seen as a final product for the general readership. It is vital that the creative team producing the visual work understands it, the editor of the project and the penciller especially. The script allows more control through the mode of production on the part of the editor, who is well aware of the cohesive whole from the beginning of art production, and the writer, who, depending on the level of detail and dictated structure in the script, would maintain more of the creative control on the final output of the visuals. Comic writer Gail Simone comments this on her approach:

> It varies from book to book and artist to artist. A humor or horror or mystery book needs precise timing and foundation. A fight scene is more purely visual. And the confidence in the artists' abilities plays a big role. (Gail Simone, e-mail message to author, 1 December 2011)

The script is essentially a tool. As Brian Michael Bendis puts it, the script is aimed at three to four people: the editor/s, who you want to entertain, and the artists who you want to inspire in order to get their best work for the visuals of the story (Bendis 2012).

As mentioned above, there may be conflicting desires between editors and creators. Darkhorse Comics Editor-in-Chief Scott Allie admits "Sometimes you can't let them [writers] tell the story they want. You're dealing with corporate properties… (Wickline 2013). At this point, the concept of creating an art form and a commercially viable product comes into conflict. Much of this research has tried to focus on the ways the writers and artists have created comic books. In the case of third-party licensing, such as those that IDW would deal with[47], the script becomes a tool for story by committee. Such interactions and dealings are far outside the scope of this thesis, and only briefly mentioned here to convey where modern comic book production (with the need for a road map, such as a script) can often lead, with "creator summits" (Khori 2011) often driving a year's worth of stories and events for an overall comic universe, much like how a soap opera is written for television, or the "Levitz Paradigm" (O'Neil 2001, 102-103), which is a method to structure writing comics for a series utilised by Paul Levitz during his time on *Teen Titans*.

> I depend mightily on the artists for visualizing these things [the story]. I am painfully strict with my writing and construction, but the artist is likely a hundred times more visually acute than I, and will do much better presenting that idea the page is conveying. (Gail Simone, e-mail message to author, 1 December 2011)

As writer Gail Simone alludes to in the above quote, the comic book script is an intangible formula, in that a script can have many formats, depending on the preferences of the writer, and the considerations they take with the creative team they are working with. Brian Michael Bendis describes his method as writing to the known strengths (and weaknesses) of each artist he works with (Bendis 2012). He describes scripts from writer Dan Slott (*Amazing Spider-man, Superior Spider-man*) as "kinetic" (i.e., movement based) with very little dialogue (Bendis 2012). This approach is not uncommon, as comic writer Garth Ennis attests to:

> I keep my scripts as sparse as possible. Partly that's because I trust the two guys I'm working with [Steve Dillon and *Hitman* artist John McCrae] implicitly...I remember Jamie Delano telling me he makes his scripts kind of 'artist friendly', almost like a letter from himself to the artist. Personally, I prefer to get the collaboration aspects out of the way before the work begins, so when the artist comes to draw it they have as little information as possible in front of them. That way they can process it in their head quickly and get down to work. (cited in Salisbury 1999, 80)

[47] A license to produce the comic book adaptation of a character based on a TV show/film, for instance.

The latter is also true, which reinforces the no formula/template approach to comic book scriptwriting. As renowned writer Neil Gaiman comments:

> An Alan [Moore] script for a twenty-four page comic will probably be about eighty pages long. A Grant [Morrison] script for a twenty- four page comic would normally come in at about forty-four pages long. With me, a script for a twenty-four page comic would normally come in at about forty-eight pages, maybe 10,000 words. I think part of it was influenced by Alan, yes, but I think mostly it was wanting to be able to call the shots. If I say, 'Dredd comes in room', I want to know what kind of room, what kind of angle is he coming in at, is that important, and what else do we need to know? Very often an artist I've been working a long time with, or I trust and who have obviously got it, I may well be giving them panel descriptions that are no longer than, 'Dredd comes in room'. With an artist I don't know or haven't worked with before, you'll get much, much longer panel descriptions because I'm trying to cover all the bases. (cited in Salisbury 1999, 103)

The key feature of all the comments cited here is trust. These writers each highlighted the idea that they want their vision of the story to be realised (and, with the right artist, exceeded), so how the script is put together seems to depend on how familiar the writer is with the artist, or how professional or experienced the artist is. Writer Kurt Buisek states:

> Doing a full script gives me more control, but doing it plot style gives the artist more freedom, which can be a good thing, especially if it's for the right kind of artist. If I did full script for [*Avengers* artist] George Perez it would be terribly confining for him ... But in something like *Marvels* or *Astro City*, where the pacing and the internal narrative—what's going on in the lead character's head—is so important, if I scripted them in Marvel plot style it wouldn't work as well. (cited in Salisbury 1999, 17)

In the documentary *Countdown to Wednesday* (2003), comic book writers and editors such as Jim McLauchlin and Mark Waid discuss the fact there are no "comic book writing programs", but "anything that teaches you storytelling is a good place to start" (such as structure, what a story is, introduction to conflict to conclusion, etc.). Increasingly, the modern comic book writing sensibility tends to falls into the realms of screenwriting, particularly with the formats of stories that are deliverable as a four part, or five-to-six part miniseries, which tend to attempt to fall into acts per issue (O'Neil 2001, 86 – 87). Knowledge of the three-act narrative structure is an important component in the way scriptwriting for comics is structured, particularly with storytelling post-1990s comics becoming once again the driving force behind consumer tastes for stories.

The more prominent modern hero comic books scriptwriters aim to use the medium to their advantage. For example, Brian Michael Bendis states that he aims to end the last panel of every page posing a question to the reader, to entice them to turn over (Bendis 2012), and Mark Waid uses digital means to tell a story with his scripts for his creator-owned superhero story *Insufferable*, delivered online via online publisher *Thrillbent* (Fischer 2013). Being that there is no definitive format, some scripts have become unwieldy, such as Alan Moore's scripts for *Watchmen*, where issue 1 was 98 pages worth of single-spaced typing. John Romita Jr. describes Chris Claremont's *X-men* scripts as a "tome" (Cooke 2002, 45-B). However, as comic creator Randy Stradley confirms, most writers try to adhere to the following rule: "A good writer avoids creating scripts with too much information or too little description" (in Talon 2007, 31).

Given the above, it seems as though comic-book writing is a balancing act. Furthermore, the research confirms that the most effective comic scriptwriters have a grasp on a few select aspects in relation to the production. Apart from the deadline, they are conscious of who they are writing for (the artist's strengths and weaknesses); visual storytelling; the comic book medium itself and its unique qualities over other visual mediums (in terms of pacing, what can fit onto a page, the amount of words, what the artist can achieve per panel/per page); and, above all, clarity of the story being told. Veteran comic and animation illustrator Alex Toth states:

> I respect good writing and I don't respect bad writing, and I try to be true to that script, and I try to plus it wherever possible. That's our job. A bum script comes in and you got to make that thing work…. that's the name of the game, selling it, interesting all of you out there in buying it. (cited in Morrow 2004, (Vol1) 174).

The other predominant method of writing is less formal than full script, and it is complete with its own extensive positives and negatives. This is a more common method of production for writers and artists attuned to each other, and even more so with writer/artists who are natural storytellers or can create stories visually in the thumbnailing/roughs process—such as Jack Kirby or Frank Miller (Salisbury 1999, 194-196).

2.2.2: The Marvel method

The plot-driven or "Marvel Method" (O'Neil 2001, 24) was first coined in reference to the writing method used by the Marvel Comics' "bullpen"[48] in the 1960s, where writer/editor Stan Lee was working on multiple titles with a handful of trusted artists illustrating the comic books. In its simplest terms, in this method, rather than a writer providing a script to the artist, both writer and artist discuss the plot of a story (or the writer suggests a plot to the artist like an open dialogue story brief), then the artist pencils the story (be it a short story or a full 20/22-page issue), telling it visually and at their own pacing (with no writer input). Examples of Jack Kirby's pages from this era demonstrate the penciller providing notes in the margins for the writer, describing the story and panels in order for the writer to provide dialogue and captions (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.30). In fact, there is evidence of this method being used as far back as the late 1930s/early 1940s. Joe Simon describes a similar working method with Jack Kirby in the early 1940s:

> I did most of the writing, but Jack could write, too. We'd script the story right on the board, and make notes in the margins. Jack was excellent at following the story, adding to it, or reinventing it if that was what it needed. (Simon 2012, 87)

Several accounts, including one cited in *Comic Book Superheroes Unmasked* (2003), discuss the collaboration that occurred when Namor the Submariner creator/artist Bill Everett and the Human Torch creator/artist Carl Burgos discussed the idea of doing a comic where their two characters meet. According to the tale, Timely Comics publisher Martin Goodman heard about the story and wanted the issue completed within a few days, meaning a group of writers and artists met and wrote and drew the issue over a weekend, "yelling out ideas" as they drew on the art boards (*Comic Book Superheroes Unmasked* 2003). Though not as chaotic as the above description, the method of creating comics without an initial script (artist driven) became Marvel's modus operandi in the late 1950s/1960s under Stan Lee's editorial reign At the time, highly experienced illustrators such as Steve Ditko and Jack Kirby were employed there. Jack Kirby had created and written stories for multiple comic publishers (including his own short-lived label with Joe Simon), with a visual storytelling style that had been popular in many titles as far back as the 1940s (such as *Captain American, The Boy Commandoes, Young Romance*). It seems in this early history of the Silver Age Marvel heroes' genesis, Stan

[48] The term used constantly by Marvel editor Stan Lee to describe the collective of scripters and artist working in the Marvel Comics offices/on Marvel titles in the 1960s. Refers to the area in baseball where the pitchers warm up, or an open area where prisoners are kept.

Lee utilised Jack Kirby in virtually every early book and character design, and he often drew the debut issues, or the designs for the other artists working under Stan Lee's editorial gaze. This included designing artist Bill Everett's *Daredevil* costume (Evanier 2008, 133), pencilling the cover, design and early *Iron Man*[49] issue, which artist Don Heck worked on (Evanier 2008, 128), designed villains that featured on the covers of comics drawn by other artists[50], and developing the original *Spiderman*[51] concept (Simon and Simon 2003, 184). Other artists, working in the Bullpen, learned how to use this method (often via Jack Kirby's layouts) such as John Buscema, John Romita, Dick Ayers, Gene Colan, Don Heck, George Tuska, and Werner Roth. As John Buscema says of Jack Kirby, "He was a genius as far as I'm concerned. He revolutionised the way we did comics" (cited in Ro 2004, 145). The writing method itself though, seems not to be one that was preplanned. Rather, it was a production process that came from circumstance:

> What makes this writing method rather interesting is that it was not intended as an actual "method" of comic writing. Rather, it came out of a level of necessity due to the work demands on Lee. Romita notes, "The whole thing that [Stan] and Jack started was strictly for expediency because he didn't have the scripts ready. It was not done out of a stroke of genius, it was done out of expedience... (Schumer 2012, 7)

In practice, this made Stan Lee stand out. He had been involved in comics since 1941 with a prose story in *Captain America Comics* #3, and script in #5. He helped usher in the superhero renaissance of the late 1950s and 1960s using this method, which made his name synonymous with the superhero genre (for better or worse; often taking the credit away from others, as unintentional it may be (Raphael & Spurgeon 2003, 265)). He has now become an international household name, probably more so for his public appearances associated with the contemporary Disney-owned Marvel films, rather than his comic writing and creative contributions (Raphael & Spurgeon 2003, 266 – 267). This collaborative approach encapsulates the mechanics of the Marvel method, and facilitated Lee's signature contribution to the Marvel comics: bouncy dialogue, friendly and powerful narration, multi-layered characters, solid editing, and a variety of action, drama, comedy in his added writing method, all with emotional resonance (as discussed in Hatfield 2012, 85 - 87). Denny O'Neil discusses this method of writing in his book

[49] The original and early *Iron Man* stories featured in the title *Tales of Suspense*, from issue #39 (1962).
[50] Such as *The Juggernaut* from *The X-Men #12* (1965), and *Wonder Man* from *The Avengers #9* (1964).
[51] Developed during the 1950s, the original concept, which became *The Silver Spider* for Harvey comics, before becoming *The Fly* for Archie comics in the late 1950s. This idea was later dubbed *Spider-man* (with a hyphen) by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko in 1962.

The DC Comics Guide to Writing Comics (O'Neil 2001) and it is referred to in many books in relation to Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's work (Morrow 2004-2013).

There are benefits of writing in this manner. As John Romita Sr. puts it, "this was a visual medium that had become a verbal medium for fifty years, and suddenly it was a visual medium that is what was intended in the first place" (Schumer 2012, 7). That is, using this method, the artist becomes more of an integral part of the overall storytelling process; they are not constrained by panels and descriptions from a writer's script, but are the visual craftsmen of the comic stories themselves. In a discussion with Cooke's *Comic Book Artist* publication, Romita Sr. discusses the Marvel method from an artist's point of view:

> [*Comic Book Artist* interviewer:] The Marvel approach is vastly different than what was ever done in comic books before. Gil Kane would complain that he was doing twice the amount of work for only half the amount of pay, so to speak. You're problem solving details of the plot while you're drawing. Isn't that the writer's job?
>
> John Romita Sr.: What Gil and I used to argue and I told him, "Yes, it is an imposition on us, but it also is a freedom, because when you're bound by a script, your parameters are absolutely narrow…you can only go so far. When you have a plot that gives you wide latitude that becomes easier for you, because an artist can be selective and put in things that are natural to him, that he loves to do. When you do it from a script, you are forced to do what has been written". I always told him, "You may think this is taking you time, this may free you and make it easier for you, because you can choose the shots that are natural, you don't have to sweat over shots that are unnatural. (Cooke 2002, 45-B)

Most of the comments from professionals, when asked about what they like about working in this method, surround their artistic freedom to create the visuals in the storytelling process:

> …I love working the Marvel style, because it gives the artist a lot of freedom to do what he wants, and there's a lot open to interpretation, which is what I enjoy. (Artist Adam Kubert cited in Cooke, Schumer, and Knowles 2002, 45)
>
> …I grew up with it. It's the best way to do it! The artist should decide the visuals. As long as you stick to the crux of what the writer wants. (Artist John Romita Jr. cited in Cooke 2002, 38-B)
>
> With the Marvel method, there is room to play around with the pacing of the story. If you think, well, this could use a couple of extra panels, you're free to throw in a couple of extra beats in this particular scene and stretch out a moment in time. (Artist Mike Wieringo cited in Talon 2007, 41)
>
> It was so refreshing when Stan came up with the new concept to have the artists work from plots. It was revolutionary, and I think it was responsible, more than anything else, for the creative explosion in comic books. I cannot understand

> why they've gone back to full script. (Artist Sal Buscema cited in Amash and Nolen-Weathington 2010, 89)

Numerous examples in the research provide evidence that this dynamic creates excellent working relationships, which is then reflected in the output. John Romita Jr. talks on pencilling *Daredevil*: "...Ann Nocenti even asked me what I thought about some plots…"Wow! Someone asked me about a plot!" I was able to do loose plots with Ann and whatever I wanted, and she would write according to the artwork, the way it was supposed to be done, and we had a great time…" (Cooke 2002, 26-B).

Using this method, the writer saves time by not having to write a full script for the artist, and the writer may find inspiration in the visuals provided to them at the dialogue stage that they perhaps may not have thought of when conceiving the story. One example is the superhero creation *the Silver Surfer* in *Fantastic Four* #48 (1965), a character introduced into the story by Jack Kirby without Stan Lee's prior knowledge until the dialoguing stage, which inspired Lee further in the visuals of that particular story, and for future incarnations of the character (Gartland, cited in Morrow 2008, 60). It is an opportunity for the writer to also be able to add suitable text and even subtext to the story, giving it extra depth. John Romita Sr. continues on pencilling *The Amazing Spider-man*:

> …I think time-wise, maybe I did lose a day or two on every storyline. But I also think we ended up with a better product, and that's beneficial for both the writer and the artist…As soon as Stan had the original art to go from, he wrote things that were never in his mind! Expressions we did...Stan always said it liberated him to do much better dialogue and much better captions, because the picture was there. Instead of these vague images he had in his own head, hoping we could match them, this is much better. (in Cooke 2002, 45-B)

Steve Ditko is another major name associated with this method; he was one of the rare artists in the early Marvel Comics superhero period who Stan Lee left to his own devices. Being one of the original pre-1960s Marvel artists, Steve Ditko was accustomed to the short sci-fi monster genre pieces generated by Stan Lee's simple plot outline, before expanding this notion in full books once the superhero genre became back in fashion at Marvel. His illustrative and storytelling style was unique (Bell 2008, 26) and a counterpoint to Jack Kirby's dynamic action, but he was instrumental to the success of the Marvel method. Much like Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko would plot and illustrate entire issues without Stan Lee's initial input. Along with illustrating the first 39 issues of *The Amazing Spider-man*, it has been said he was plotting almost exclusively by issue 18 (Bell 2008, 87) The fact he co-created one of the most

successful characters in superhero comics (*Spider-man*) and another celebrated title (*Dr. Strange*) with memorable stories and support cast under this method is testament to this approach to writing (Bell 2008, 79).

There are also negatives to this method of writing, some of which are related to the craft itself, and others related to copyrights, work practices and "authorship" arguments (Hatfield 2012, 80 – 81). While the business details are outside the scope of this research, the main issue appears to occur when the method is not practiced appropriately. One focus of this research is to see which writer/artist methodologies can be learned and adapted from the American model to the Australian context, determining where, when and how it is most appropriate to use a certain method. Some of the negative aspects also relate closely to the advantages.

One issue is that the writer has less control over the story being created, relying on the artist to do the bulk of the creative work. It saves much time on the writer's behalf, but certainly places more of an onus on the artist to create the story.

Another issue in the past has been how to credit the collaborators on the work achieved. The crux of this collaborative methodology between a writer and artist becomes "who did what" and "who gets credit". This has proven troublesome for comic book historians (and eventually, lawyers) when looking back at the Marvel superheroes publications and the creative process of the era. Examples such as Steve Ditko's later run on *The Amazing Spider-man* have shown that, at points, Stan Lee (still credited as writer), had no idea what a story submitted by Steve Ditko would be until the art had arrived on his desk (Bell 2008, 91). Similar instances occurred with Jack Kirby on such titles as *The Mighty Thor* or *The Fantastic Four.* It has been suggested by sources such as Mike Gartlands's articles "a Failure to Communicate" (such as the discussion of the Marvel method in Morrow 2009, 95 - 97) and Hatfield (2012, 92 – 93), that as Stan Lee became busier, with more titles being added to the publishing schedule, and his growing college campus speech commitments etc., that Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko (along with other Marvel artists such as Don Heck, Dick Ayers, John Romita Snr., and John Buscema) were often left to plot and draw issues virtually without any input from the writer, until the dialogue stage would begin. This was possible with the calibre of storytelling art that these men were accustomed to and able to produce, but it led to a major part of the arguments and resentments that have caused continuous debates among comic fans and researchers, and litigation disputes that continue, mainly because

the credits of these comic books still stated "Written by Stan Lee, Art by Jack Kirby/Steve Ditko" (Cooke 2013, 42).

Writer, comic book historian and close friend/former assistant to Jack Kirby, Mark Evanier aptly explains the writing style of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, encapsulating the possible problems with working using the Marvel method:

> …The two of them, whenever they talk about writing a comic, are using the word "writing" in completely different methods. To Jack, writing was primarily conceptualising the plot and to Stan, writing was primarily filling in word balloons. So you always had a communication problem there. They're two men who are very similar in many ways, both with a lot of common background, a lot of very common values on certain levels. They both have some of the same bad habits, including two of the worst memories you'll ever hear in your life…But I think that there are some partnerships that, as the success increases, the people change… (cited in Morrow 2004, 114)

What this means to creators wishing to use this method is that it is crucial to think about the business aspect of the project first, and discuss the terms up front. At the outset, they should decide on the creative workload that each party is willing to undertake so as to avoid situations of ownership and creative input. This aspect was important in the studio application of the Marvel method, particularly on *The Soldier Legacy's Strange Tales* #1.

Another disadvantage of the Marvel method from the artist's perspective is that they may find their intended story misinterpreted or changed from his/her original intentions, based on the dialogue added by the writer. Examples of this have occurred in Steve Ditko and Jack Kirby's superhero stories, when Stan Lee changed the intended plot points to *The Fantastic Four* stories, or where characters were dialogued saying sentences and subtext not intended by the pencillers. Mike Gartland's series of articles "A failure to communicate" for *The Jack Kirby Collector* highlight this problem in relation to Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. One example of a complete plot and character motivation change from the artist's intention can be found in *The Fantastic Four* # 66-67 (Morrow 2008, 104-109), where Stan Lee ignored the notes provided by Jack Kirby: "the entire reason for the story had been gutted, replaced" (Morrow 2008, (*The Collected Jack Kirby Collector*) 108).

A flaw in the process comes from the main users themselves, since notes were not written down (Howe 2013, 65). Much of these early plotting sessions between Stan Lee

and Jack Kirby were spontaneous, and therefore when it came time to sitting down to draw the story, it was different than discussed. John Romita Sr. reflects:

> Jack would draw his version of their plot, and Stan would write his version, and never the twain ever met. Jack never read the printed comic books, because all he remembered was his storyline. (cited in Cooke 2002, 13-B -14-B)

Evanier also points this out in his interview with John Morrow for *The Jack Kirby Collector*. Evanier was an assistant to Jack Kirby from 1969 to the mid-1970s, the period where Jack Kirby left Marvel to work with DC as an artist/writer/editor on his own creations:

> [*The Jack Kirby Collector* interviewer:] How did Jack work? Did he outline and thumbnail? Did he start at page 1 and work in sequence, or bounce around?
>
> Mark Evanier: It was never sequential, he would just start drawing. He would do sequences. He would roughly know what a story was about when he started, but it could change completely by the time he got to the end. There were dozens of cases where Jack told us this wonderful story he was going to do in the next issue and then sit down and did something completely different. (Morrow 2004, 114)

The Marvel method seems to rely on the fact that the artist must be a good visual storyteller for the story to succeed. This was partly the reason why during their 1960s working relationship, Stan Lee had Jack Kirby occasionally provide layouts for pencillers to understand what Lee was trying to achieve in his superhero stories: “Lee told Romita he'd get another artist to break down the story into rough layouts, to show him how it was done. Then he called Jack Kirby" (Howe 2013, 58).

In *John Romita…And All That Jazz* (Thomas and Amash 2007), Romita Sr. talks about how his transfer from the DC Comics romance department to Marvel’s superheroes department was a slight learning curve, with Jack Kirby collaborating on *Daredevil* #13 for layout chores, mainly to help the action along in the story with dynamic poses, camera angles and variety of shots to suit. Jack Kirby also assisted Romita on other titles such as *Tales of Suspense* featuring *Captain America* (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.34). The main focus was the pacing of the story and the “dynamism” that Stan Lee as the editor wanted for his superhero/action comic line that Jack Kirby naturally brought to his storytelling style (Thomas and Amash 2007, 47-48). Artist Don Heck was in the early Marvel bullpen at the time, drawing the early *Iron Man* and later *Avengers* stories around the time Jack Kirby was on the books. Don Heck was quoted as saying: “Stan

[Lee] said Kirby draw like Kirby, Steve [Ditko] draw like Steve and everyone else draw like Kirby" (Evanier 2008, 133).

However, not every artist was able to work in this method. This was not due to skill but monetary concerns. As freelancers, there was a finite time these artists could work on a story, due to deadline. Another consideration was the amount they were paid per page verses their general living expenses. Marvel did not pay as much as DC at the time, and the extra plotting work for some was not worth the time for the money, particularly when panels or pages needed to be changed on the behest of Stan Lee to serve the story (Howe 2013, 52). For an artist having to then expand a shoestring plot into 10 or 20 pages was different to the other companies at the time, such as DC, who operated under full script. Artist Wally Wood was only with Marvel a short time (1964–66): "To Wood, the so-called Marvel method—drawing an issue before there was a script—meant that he was plotting the story without being paid or credited…" (Howe 2013, 57). Joe Orlando concurs, "The problem…was that I wasn't Jack Kirby. Jack—or Ditko, or just a couple of others—could take a couple of sentences of a plot and bring in 20 pages that Stan could dialogue in an afternoon or two…I didn't plot it out the way he wanted the story told so I wound up drawing at least half of every story twice…" (Howe 2013, 52).

Comic creator Colleen Doran (Doran 2011) notes that this method is for a "close, trusted writer/artist team" where this style can result in great, innovative collaborations and a fun, freewheeling storytelling process. Marvel and DC Comic artist Mike Wieringo agrees; "[There is a] Teamwork mentality that the Marvel method inspires" (Talon 2007, 41).

Colleen Doran stipulates that the superhero comics trend of "splashy" (Doran 2011) full-page images and dynamic panels, which became more commonplace on every page of a story in the 1990s, might not necessarily serve the writer's intent. This makes it easier for the artist as they are essentially ignoring what they are told to draw in order to draw what they feel like. So, for example, a composition of one posed character as opposed to several panels (and therefore several considerations in composition and more pencil and layout work) that a writer may have indicated for the storytelling aspect. Colleen Doran indicated that this was in fact due to economic reasons, rather than from an artistic choice, which creates a problem for the writer when the art is returned to them to dialogue. Further, Colleen Doran said that art pages with fewer

panels, and more splashier panels (skimping on storytelling for the purpose of a more pinup style illustration), sells less for artists who can make money off their original art pages (Doran 2011). Storytelling was sacrificed for higher value per page, meaning also that the writer would have to "econceptualise the story upon viewing the finished artwork:

> [*Comic Book Artist* interviewer:]…a few years ago there was this whole Rob Liefield/Image kind of look where everybody just wanted to draw pin-ups…
>
> Adam Kubert:…You can't do pin-up shot after pin-up shot and still tell a story…today, that type of storytelling isn't really in vogue. It's not selling, because it's not a story…what's selling now is good storytelling. (Cooke, Schumer, and Knowles 2002, 35)

The research evidences that both the writer and the artist need to be aware of their own and each other's capabilities in what can be achieved by each using this process, and trust that their task for clarity in an entertaining story will be upheld for the collective good of the final product. Whether it is a question of experience and experimentation seems to depend on the individual. Much like the American creators of the 1930s and 1940s, and the Marvel bullpen of the 1960s, the necessity to streamline the steps in production, yet experiment through trial and error with the form dictates the method of comic creation that goes against any notion of rules or the only method.

My research and studio experience, in which I collaborated with a writer and also without (as a large chunk of the studio work was solo produced), proved that the Marvel method is the one collaborative approach that hands the visual storytelling reins to the penciller. This comes with a danger of an inexperienced or non-inventive penciller staying safe with their shot selections or action in the story; with the co-plotting occurring with another party, the onus is to the responsibility of fulfilling the expectations of the creative team, and the readers—that is, clarity of story, told entertainingly. It is a visual storytelling medium after all, and although this method conflicts with constructive and procedural comic making (where a writer and editor are able to make suggestions/changes to the story on the front end, and a script document exists for the process), it is nevertheless a viable and engaging method for creators to use, where appropriate. Colleen Doran said "Your script only matters when working for a client" (Doran 2011). Brian Michael Bendis also reiterated that point in those exact words (Bendis 2012). Today it seems that, particularly with Marvel and DC, the Marvel

method is no longer widely used. Sal Buscema discusses this in an interview with Jim Amash:

> I would get the plot, and I would interpret that plot, or translate it into 20 pages of pictures….that was left up to me, and that was the joy of working at Marvel. This was not the case at DC, where they had full scripts with tight plots. I understand that's the way they work at Marvel now, and we all know where the business is going. I wonder if it has anything to do with it…(cited in Amash and Nolen-Weathington 2010, 39)

This is perhaps due to the more lucrative nature of properties in the industry with retreats or creator meetings taking place that ensure that at least a year's worth of story material (and events) are planned out in the grand scheme of the character universes that the editors, writers and artists manage (Khouri 2011). There is a pitch process for writers working with certain companies and editors who manage specific titles/characters, in order for the writer to interest the editor to initiate the work with them (Humphries 2009). With the aim of gaining and maintaining an audience on a title, plus the market trend of story arcs being collected into trade paperbacks/graphic novels for book sales (after the single issue releases), it can be seen where the Marvel method of working without scripts can prove problematic to the planning of an arc or continuing run. In that regard, the writers and editors are left out of the creative process, and any foreshadowing that needs to be done visually (for an upcoming story/conflict for example) could be overlooked by the artist. Often this would rely on dialogue to get the ideas across. Stan Lee was able create sub-text in the stories or an insight into what the characters are thinking. This is something that an image cannot convey alone in the context of the action plot.

While these main two methods are touted in superhero comics in particular, the research points to two further points. Firstly, there is a gradation in the way full scripts are written, and secondly the Marvel method has become more hybrid among trusted pencillers who work with writers. It may not work for a complete story, but at the very least, it is appropriate for action-oriented scenes, where the artist is able to choreograph based on minimal script direction. John Romita Jr. discusses working with writer J. Michael Straczynski on their *Amazing Spider-man* run in 2001:

> I struggled at first because I'd never worked with a full script before, but his are different from the standard full script. This is not telling me what to draw; this is a script with dialogue that describes things. There are moments where he'll detail some visuals to me, but never standing over me with a hammer saying "You've got to draw this!" He'll write some dialogue, describing some scenes, some panels he'll say, "John: Knock yourself out." If it's possible to have a script with

> a lot of room, this is what he's done… (cited in Cooke, Schumer, and Knowles 2002, 31)

Similarly, from a writer's perspective, Ed Brubaker describes a full-script method that also allows the established artist more leeway in the way the story is told and laid out, "I don't do panel breakdowns, I just breakdown a page and write everything that needs to happen on that page" (cited in Roots and Korgon 2004, 44).

However, these rules can be negated if the writer is also the editor. Though more prevalent in the 1970s, writer/editor roles at Marvel have become commonplace; for instance, Roy Thomas, Len Wein, Marv Wolfman, and Jack Kirby (Wein 2013). When there are less people involved, it changes the nature of scripts verses plot-driven stories; there are either less people to work on the monthly book so there is a need to streamline the processes to meet the deadline, or less people who need to know the plot to begin with.

Writer/artist Todd McFarlane developed a writing and drawing style that suited his schedule. This came about through expediency, again much like Romita's comment regarding Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's Marvel method. He describes his work on the early 1990s *Spider-man* title:

> At that point, I was writing, pencilling and inking. That's three full-time jobs. So I had to basically figure out a way to be very economical with how I spent my time. So, in the writing process I figured out how to cut corners 'cause I was drawing for myself…Because you were in control of the whole package you were able to massage it and get through the monthly grind. (cited in Salisbury 1999, 175)

Todd McFarlane points out that he never wrote a full script, or even a plot, before starting the artwork, stating that he would have a conversation over the phone with the editor, and then sit and make some notes. He would basically outline to himself (or even with artist Greg Capullo when he was drawing *Spawn* for Todd McFarlane as writer/editor from 1993 to 1999, 2003 to 2004) the page numbers, with a brief, simplistic description of what was intended for the page. Again working with Greg Capullo, Todd McFarlane describes a Marvel method approach of chatting to Greg Capullo on the phone, while the conversation is recorded by the artist (Salisbury 1999, 174):

> It's true. Todd McFarlane would give me the plot over the phone. I'd take notes, he'd tell me how many pages of what he needed & I'd go...Occasionally, [Todd] would have a specific visual idea-start with bits of torn paper, pull back to see... Sort of thing...Mostly, I was directed by [Todd] to give him a certain number of

> pages for a scene. He'd tell me where he needed extra room for [Something special]... (Capullo message to author 20 December 2013)

Todd McFarlane described the intriguing process of writing and constructing a story whereby he would draw a set of pages and sequence, then lays them out on the floor, using them to decide whether he needs to rearrange the pages, add more or change them. This process is sometimes used again at the completion of the book's art:

> There were times where to some extent I had all twenty-two pages done, and I would literally lay the twenty-two pages on the floor in the order I thought I wanted, and then start to rearrange them. I'd go "That page actually looks better over here, and this scene looks better over there." Just like an editor on a film…Then I would just kinda grab all the pages up and I'd go, "Okay, I need to start writing the story right here". (McFarlane, cited in Salisbury 1999, 170)

Mark Evanier describes something similar in the way Jack Kirby put together his *Fourth World* books. Jack Kirby was writing the four comic books for this planned epic and all the plots were essentially in his head:

> …Jack would start drawing with key sequences, and occasionally a sequence would be kept for another comic when he ended up with extra pages. If you notice, most of the cuts between scenes occur on page breaks. That's the function of him juggling pages back and forth and doing sequences out of order. Occasionally, if it cuts in the middle of a page, he'd erase half the page in order to start it there. He'd just basically work it through, and the first page of the comic might be the last thing drawn, or the first thing drawn…(cited in Cooke, Schumer, and Knowles 2002, 114)

Again, I can only attribute this to the experience on the part of writer/artists Todd McFarlane and Jack Kirby in these cases (and similar to the process Frank Miller adopts in his dual writer/artist role on his initial *Daredevil* run in the early 1980s and mini-series *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (Dallas 2013, 29-30, 170-171). Jack Kirby, in particular, had, by that point (the 1970s), been working in comics for thirty years, predominately without scripts, even when collaborating with other writers (notable periods with Joe Simon and Stan Lee). Alan Moore mentions the idea of pure experience in this case, where the method is not prescribed. Alan Moore says it is "Riding bareback: Starting to write from an idea without a specific ending in mind…25 years of experience in the business, I'm pretty good at pulling myself out of jams" (Millidge 2011, 300). This is not to say however, that structure is disregarded as Alan Moore states, "I'm confident that the structure will emerge as the story progresses, and that keeps it fresher for me" (Millidge 2011, 300).

In experimenting with storytelling, I created *The Soldier Legacy* #3 using Todd McFarlane (and Jack Kirby's) method, but with somewhat more of a structure. My solo comic series incorporates two stories; one in 1943, one in the present, and I plotted the story beats down page by page, making sure a scene would end at the end of a page, much like how Evanier describes Jack Kirby's process when writing and penciling his own stories in the 1970s (cited in Cooke 2002, 114). Then, I laid all the pages down on the floor in the way Todd McFarlane described, and rearranged them to create a mix of the two. The edit decisions were logical: a pause or tail of a story beat and/or end of a scene provided the opportunity to show a scene from the modern story, so that both keep moving along. In this instance, it provided the opportunity to create a parallel between the events and characters of the two stories, particularly the protagonists' arcs. *The Soldier Legacy* #2 was initially written this way. I would not be confident to do this every time: I aim to draw the panels on the pages to propel a comic story, and felt it would not make sense to rearrange pages based on look. Whether McFarlane's method works because of the poster style free-form layouts, with non-traditional guttering he drew in his 1990s' *Spawn* pages (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.67 & 1.68), or because he was able to craft his stories scene by scene/page-by-page with multiple characters meaning the order would not be a compromise on the story is another matter, and purely speculation.

The above is a general overview of comic-book creating methods, and it is impossible (and pointless) to try to define every comic's idiosyncratic methods. Each example is influenced by a number of factors; individual creators, books, editor/s controlling the book, the publishing company involved, the era in which the story is published, whether character licenses are involved, etc. Here I have attempted to look at the methods of a handful of the more prominent creators who have been influential in the genre/medium.

2.3: Narrative Considerations When Writing

> *Clarity, I think, is probably the single most important thing in comic book writing…*
>
> (Mark Waid, cited in Salisbury 1999, 229)

Comic book writer Mark Waid's quote leads into the next consideration separate to the functions of writing discussed so far. It is important to distinguish the differences in what is being discussed here. Discussing full script and the Marvel method/plot-driven

script pertain to the way stories are constructed from a production point of view: what the writer produces, what the artist produces, what role the editor plays, etc., in relation to transforming the comic book narrative page created from idea to print and screen.

The actual method of what to write is different to how a story is put together; that is, the what relates to all the aspects of writing that make good storytelling. It is necessary to discuss this, as the story and character must sell the reader, otherwise the comic fails in delivering its intended goal. That is, the reader fails to engage with the work, be entertained, and therefore rejects the work and subsequent issues of the work. While I realise that my approach is not foolproof, I hope to reach and maintain a certain target audience who enjoy the style of story I enjoy writing, which is based on what influences and inspires me, and my own personal thoughts. Overall, my aim for this project was to create empathetic characters that readers could be invested in, drawing them in through humour, the skill the characters possess, and the dangerous situation the main protagonist/s find themselves in.

There have been shifts in the overall focus and tastes of comic reader audiences over the years, not just in genres but also in the type of stories and characters they have responded to. Further, there have been shifting tastes in visuals, where the artwork/artist in the book takes precedence over the actual story—as shown in the 1990s, with pin up style pages and "splashier panels"[52] (Doran 2011). Superhero comic books evolved over the decades based on the socio-political history of USA, the industry itself, the creators involved and their working conditions, and the tastes of readers.

Fortunately, the thrust in the types of superhero comics today seems to have returned to writer driven considering much of the 1990s pinup over story came from the rise of Image Comics, a reaction to the speculation period (Raphael and Spurgeon 2003, 236, 241) and the "grim and gritty" characters conveyed in the 1980s (Margerrison 2007). Alan Moore, who wrote *Watchmen, Batman: The Killing Joke, Swamp Thing*, has this to say on writing and character changes:

> It seems that the existence of *Watchmen* had pretty much doomed the mainstream comic industry to about 20 years of very grim and often pretentious stories that seemed to be unable to get around the massive psychological

[52] "Splashier" or "pin up" panels and pages mean that the artist has sacrificed strong storytelling composition and camera choices for more shots (or less panels per page) of just the main characters in dynamic poses, like a poster. The notion was that this appealed to fans (and original comic art buyers) better than quieter, story driven panels that might not be as exciting, and therefore sell for less on the original art market (Doran 2011).

> stumbling block that 'Watchmen' turned out to be… (cited in Millidge 2011, 130-131)

Ironically, these same books (*Watchmen* and Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, along with Howard Chaykin's *American Flagg*) also influenced the possibilities in storytelling, albeit somewhat missed at the time by a lot of creators (Dallas 2013, 103). Alan Moore comments further on the issue:

> I looked at some of these comics. I thought, there's no story, there's no character. I've been away for 5 years and comics have turned into some bizarre super-steroid-mutant hybrid that I've got no familiarity with at all. (cited in Millidge 2011, 195)

Like any genre, to write a successful comic book means working beyond the usual clichés and tropes to create something entertaining. The biggest insight I gained from the research in relation to storytelling (apart from overall clarity of the idea, the working with an understanding of the three-act narrative structure of storytelling) is the comic book rule to "Show the reader, don't tell them" (Talon 2007, 65). Until the 1980s, comic books had always incorporated two elements to their storytelling: third-person omniscient narration and thought balloons (Dallas 2013, 23). The third-person narration often appeared as prose-like caption boxes, essentially describing action that was going on in the panel itself. The thought balloon often did this too; the hero would think about what he/she was doing, or about to do (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.58). These norms of the comic book narrative changed in the 1980s, and the features that replaced them are still prevalent in superhero comic books today (such as the pages from *Batman #5* (2012) that feature in Appendix 1 Fig 1.60 – 1.64).

No longer were comics narrated in such a way as to explain figuratively what action was occurring (as writer Len Wein states, was a throwback to the Silver Age, which many writers up until that point were influenced by (Dallas 2013, 23)). With these elements eliminated, the picture was able to tell the story. Caption boxes became the new thought balloons, offering the writers a chance to juxtapose text and/or trains of thought of the characters themselves with the visuals (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.59); often without matching up with the visuals, but creating a third meaning. *American Comic Book Chronicles: The 1980s* by Keith Dallas (2013), offers two possible reasons for the change, discussed by Jim Shooter and Len Wein: Jim Shooter (Marvel Comics Editor-in-Chief from 1978 to 1987) suggested third-person narration and thought balloons were phased out as writers began to use first-person narration and captions/dialogue only in response to Frank Miller's noir/hardboiled style of writing in *Daredevil* and

Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, and Alan Moore's *Watchmen*. Len Wein offered the alternative idea that comic book writers were attempting the narrative styles in film and TV shows, which again is a common influence. Artists often looked at film and TV in regards to the style of visual storytelling and camera choices; Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, Stan Lee, Will Eisner, and Jerry Robinson all cite movies and actors as inspiration. Either way, as the sophistication of audiences grew, modern writers increasingly allowed the reader to think independently regarding the visual and narrative combinations, which made for a more interactive and unobtrusive reading experience (Dallas 2013, 103). This began in books like Frank Miller's *Ronin* and Howard Chaykin's *American Flagg*:

> These devices [3rd omniscient Person narration and thought balloons] would fall out of favour among comic book creators either because they become inspired by ground-breaking comics…or because they perceived an older readership… (Dallas 2013, 103)

First-person narration itself was not new to this period; stories from EC Comics in the 1950s had frequently employed it (such as the stories that influenced the studio work from *Two Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat* edited by Harvey Kurtzman), as had Bob Kanigher and Joe Kubert in *Sgt. Rock* Comics from the 1970s, and Gerry Conway for *the Punisher's* War Journal, such as in *Marvel Preview* #2 from 1976 (Dallas 2013, 185). Nevertheless, it is a narrative technique that was highlighted by influential works from Frank Miller and Alan Moore, but also Art Spiegelman (*Maus*), and can be found in most superhero comics today. Ironically in Alan Moore's case he states it was through experimentation, which further helped me come to terms with my own experimentation in methods when attempting comic book illustration and writing. While working on *V for Vendetta*, Alan Moore's collaborator David Lloyd suggested that they dispense with the use of some of comics' "ubiquitous devices, namely narrative captions, thought balloons and sound effects" (Millidge 2011, 89). Alan Moore stated that having "two or three of my favourite crutches being kicked away from me…" was an initial challenge, but was pleased with what it meant for the output of the story in relation to what he was trying to achieve: "… [the] difference it made to the tone and quality of the story…[was that it became] more real and documentary" (Millidge 2011, 89).

When discussing comic methodology, one cannot ignore Scott McCloud's analysis *Understanding Comics* (McCloud 1994) in relation to writing and storytelling. There are considerations that McCloud discusses in respect to the type of juxtaposing panels

that are utilised in comics[53], the relationship between words and images, and (in particular), the "writing with pictures" chapter from *Making Comics* (McCloud 2006) is most valid in is instance. In this chapter, McCloud (2006) suggests when writing comics, there are five choices to make; the moment (i.e., what image/action to show, and what to leave out); the frame (the panel itself, and what camera choice is used); the image itself (the visual aspect, as in the lines, the style, the look); the words (what words accompany the images on the page); and the flow (the layout of the page—how the reader will be guided through the story) (McCloud 2006, 9-10). In many respects, I feel this structure is a little restrictive to the physical planning by a solo creator; nevertheless, they are very important in understanding what considerations should be made in relation to the overall craft and control of what a comic book writer/artist is trying to achieve in their work. At the same time, there are functions within those five steps that are, in mainstream superhero books, left up to different creators on the project. Depending on the style of writing (full script or the Marvel method), the penciller can also be in charge of moment, frame, image and flow. Or, if following a restrictive script, perhaps only image. An editor could in fact be in charge of the image in that they dictate the style they want for a particular book based on the hiring of the artist in the first place. This is where it can be sometimes hard to distinguish who did what exactly in the creative process, and comic book page output. The penciller's role in the storytelling is just as important, if not more important, in the execution and understanding of the comic book story.

2.4: Comic Book Visuals: Pencilling the art

The only thing that makes [comics] *worth reading is the art.*

(Kane, cited in Schumer 2003, 5)

In the quote above, veteran comic book artist Gil Kane touches on what spurred my initial interest in comics. Pencilling comic books is my favourite part of the production process, and although I spent a lot of time researching and observing the writer/artist collaboration and methods, it was my pencilling that I was most focused on improving. Improving, in relation to breaking down the story/plot into images that were both clear and entertaining, and improving in the overall sense of how I depict the intended characters, settings and situations. There is far more to drawing pictures in little boxes

[53] Such as "Action to Action", "Moment to Moment", "Scene to Scene", etc. (McCloud 1994, 70-72).

that comic books entail, and in particular to superhero comics, the action and compositional choices need to be dynamic. There are many considerations to take into account when pencilling comics that I am still trying to refine and learn, and as in the discussion of writer methods, I wanted to explore what the overall considerations of penciling and illustrating for comic books that the professionals consider, when breaking down the visuals for the comic book. From my initial research and attempts, I knew this would be a challenge, as Talon (2007) suggests:

> Breaking down a story visually tends to be a spontaneous process and [comic book artist Mark] Wieringo finds the physical act of drawing the page to be a breeze. "That's sort of mindless. Once I have the layout down that I want, then its tweaking things here and there that aren't drawn in completely. But it's a whole lot easier tracing out the finishing pencil stage—the hardest stage is doing layouts, the absolute hardest stage." (Talon 2007, 44)

My research in pencilling revealed a myriad of different styles, methods, artists and influences. Given the output of comic books over the years in the superhero genre alone, it is impossible to discuss every influential professional in the field and their work. Where a painter may have released dozens of works in their lifetime, a penciller such as Jack Kirby would have dozens of pages in just a handful of comic issues. Given that Jack produced comics for over 50 years, and as Evanier (2008) states that in 1962 to 1964, Jack Kirby produced 3,130 interior comic pages plus 285 covers, his output over his entire career is immense (Evanier 2008, 133). Through my research I aimed to understand the commonalities between pencillers in terms of what they are trying to achieve with story on the comic book page and what base fundamentals they apply do so. I then tried to apply this to my studio work. While I was hoping to improve my overall drawing skills, my research focuses specifically on the aspect of storytelling. Thus, rather than discuss pencilling in terms of how to draw a particular element, or foreshortening, perspective and the like (on which there are already quite a few books on the subject, such as *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way* (Lee & Buscema 1978), *The DC Comic Guide to Pencilling Comics* (Janson 2002), and *Draw Comics with Dick Giordano* (Giordano 2005)), I will discuss the considerations and reasoning behind the drawing choices in general. For instance, pose is discussed in relation to its use in storytelling. Line, being something that is not only subjective but also applied in an infinite number of ways according to the artist's style, choice and ability, is discussed as an element which conveys the clarity of the story (in relation to penciling and inking.)

Of course, my application of these techniques and skills was a work in progress in that the lessons were not immediately learned, or instantly handled with ease. Each sketch, each page, each issue of studio work is a learning curve, with an attempt to do better, improve on the mistakes, find a better way or learn another lesson to apply.

In a way, and as previously mentioned, the methods I use were much like those employed by the original superhero and action comic-strip artists of the New York studios in 1930s/1940s like Simon and Kirby, Eisner and Igle, Fox Publications, Timely and National, who learnt better methods though trial and error, and through their peers in the studio environment (Evanier 2008, 40). Artists in this era looked towards the more successful and long-running comic strip artists; for example, Jack Kirby, John Romita Sr., Joe Simon, Joe Kubert and Frank Robbins cited those such as Hal Foster (*Prince Valiant*), Alex Raymond (*Flash Gordon*) and Milt Caniff (*Terry and the Pirates*) as being their inspiration (Evanier 2008, 40, Thomas and Amash 2007, 9, Simon 2012, 14 et al.). Artists of the era also looked towards each other's work, with Joe Simon and Jack Kirby being a major influence on comic book trends[54]. These artists were not just indirectly influenced by each other, but drew in the same shops as each other, and thus learnt techniques and short cuts from one another. Steve Ditko, for example, enrolled in the School of Visual Arts in New York in 1950, learning under Jerry Robinson[55] (a ghost writer on the original *Batman* strips with Bill Finger—under Bob Kane—and creator of *the Joker*). Steve Ditko was also influenced and taught by Mort Meskin[56] (in his early professional career) when working in the Joe Simon and Jack Kirby–run studio, as Bell (2008) discusses:

> States Ditko about his chief lessons from Robinson: "The Basics of art—perspective, composition, anatomy, drapery, light and shade, storytelling etc. You can't draw anything well unless you understand the purpose of that drawing (storytelling), the best way to get the drawing across (individual point of view—composition) and convincingly (perspective, anatomy, drapery, light and shade). (Robinson, cited in Bell 2008, 20)

Other visual storytelling mediums influenced comic book creators. Though comics can do much more in the way they tell a story visually, camera possibilities in film are constantly improving with technological advancements, and what film directors and editors are now able to accomplish. Comic book artists have learned much about

[54] A rarity in the 1940s through to the late 1950s and early 1960s was that their signature (Simon and Kirby) would appear as a marketing tool on their comic book stories; something that was not largely practiced.
[55] Bell 2008, 19 – 20.
[56] Bell 2008, 22 – 23.

storytelling pacing, camera choice/compositions and movement in pose from the film and TV frame, as attested to by various sources:

> …I think the subject is what dictates the layout…I've studied film for years, and it's more or less dictated how I interpret things in pacing a story… (Alex Toth cited in Morrow 2004a, 174)

Jack Kirby discusses his method, of visualizing a camera to draw his shots and poses:

> I approached [my development of my art] by dramatising my drawing. I'm an inveterate movie goer. I think as a kind of camera. I am the camera and I know if you come close to me you'll distort in some way, foreshorten in some way. And of course, to me that's a dramatic happening. I experimented with that and it worked… (Jack Kirby cited in Morrow 2004a, 133)

There are many writers and artists of past and present that are influenced by what Jack Kirby created and drew during his lengthy career. For instance, writer/artist Frank Miller stated, "Jack [Kirby] developed the visual dialect, tone and spirit of the modern superhero comic" (Frank Miller cited in Jack Kirby Museum 2009). So too has Jack Kirby influenced much of my studio work.

Not only was Jack Kirby a major driving force behind many aspects of the superhero genre, but many professional creators today still look towards Jack Kirby's approach in storytelling in pencils, storytelling in character, and overall visual language he brought to comics:

> …He [Jack Kirby] was there at the ground floor, and he influenced a generation… (Dave Gibbons cited in Jack Kirby Museum 2009)
>
> Kirby did this powerful, bubbling-over with new creations! In every panel, he'd create something new. (John Romita Sr. cited in Cooke 2002, 12-B)
>
> He created a visual language for Superheroes...Nobody encapsulated the Explosive energy within the human figure and the world…inside the panel like Jack [Kirby] did... (Walter Simonson cited in Jack Kirby Museum 2009)

There are already award-winning books chronicling and critically analysing Jack Kirby's career and art, such as Mark Evanier's *Kirby: King of Comics* (2008), and *Hand of Fire: The Comic Art of Jack Kirby* by Charles Hatfield (Hatfield 2012), so it is not my aim to repeat them. Rather, my research and studio work aims to understand what he contributed to the action/superhero comic book by way of composition, the action pose, and design sense in storytelling, as well as a sense of his pacing in action. Obviously, it is an ongoing learning process, since much of Jack Kirby's narrative and art style

changed throughout his 40-odd-year career in comics[57]. Jack Kirby's (and Joe Simon's) impact on the superhero genre is aptly described here:

> Before Simon and Kirby, the superhero was, in a sense, realistically orientated. Despite the characters' superhuman powers, they were not drawn in action in ways that suggested how extraordinary they were…Alongside Simon and Kirby's work, everything else was static, pale, anemic. Nothing was the same after them (Harvey Kurtzman cited in Levitz 2013, 281)

Jack Kirby certainly did not create the superhero genre, but was one of the most instrumental in its creation, development, and methodological approaches to the craft, as Scott McCloud recognises in *Understanding Comics*; "Most mainstream comics in America employ storytelling techniques first introduced by Jack Kirby..." (McCloud 1994, 74).

Through Jack Kirby's years of experience in comics[58] and often though hardship and creation through necessity of supporting his family (Hatfield 2012, 33-34), Jack Kirby was able to mix his influences, experience and genres to create a myriad of characters, stories, and illustrations of worlds that other creators continue to borrow from (Jack Kirby Museum 2013). Jack Kirby even reinvigorated concepts not originally his, such as his work on *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen* with which he launched his multi-part comic universe referred to as *The Fourth World* (Morrow 2004d, 87) in the early 1970s, featuring *The New Gods*, and his 12-issue run on *Our Fighting Forces featuring The Losers* (Penalosa, cited in Morrow 2004d, 59). In this run, he was able to draw upon his personal experiences of his service in World War two into his storytelling. Award-winning writer Neil Gaiman noted of Jack Kirby:

> Even when he was given someone else's idea, he would build it into something unbelievable and new, like a man who was asked to repair a vacuum cleaner, but instead built it into a functioning jet pack. (cited in Morrison 2011, 121)

For me, the most compelling aspects of Jack Kirby's work are the way he created his stories, the way he drew his figures on the page (using composition techniques to create depth and focus with incidental characters, and the action poses themselves, almost as if the figures are still moving), the way he drew action and his clarity in storytelling, and the power and dynamics that exuded the lines and shapes he used in his illustration. His

[57] An example of this can be seen from three pages from three decades featuring *Captain America* in 1941 *Fighting American* in circa 1954, and the character *Captain America* circa mid 1960s, and circa 1976 in Appendix 1 Fig 1.26 – 1.29.

[58] Notably first with his innovative partnership with writer/illustrator Joe Simon in the 1940s to 1950s, with Stan Lee at Marvel Comics in the late 1950s to 1970, and then his solo work at DC and Marvel before the end of his regular comics creating career.

strength lay in his ability to lay out a comic-book page to tell a story; something that quickly became the company style at Marvel Comics during his integral character creating roll in the 1960s, as Howe (2012) suggests:

> When new artists came to Marvel, they were handed a stack of Kirby books, or better yet, a stack of Kirby's rough layouts over which to draw… (Howe 2012, 84)

2.4.1: Layouts: Storytelling Considerations, and Planning the Page

> *Illustration is an exercise in problem solving. So in a sense I tackle a story as if there's a problem I need to solve in order to tell the story most effectively...*
>
> —(Walter Simonson, cited in Talon 2007, 144)

Surveying books such as *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way* (Lee and Buscema 1978), *The DC Comics Guide to Pencilling Comics* (Janson 2002), *Draw Comics with Dick Giordano* (Giordano 2005), *Panel Discussions* (Talon 2007), there seems to be two main areas to being able to create appealing sequential art, particularly from a publishing sense for an audience appeal. One is the ability to draw (such as anatomy, objects, locations), and the other is the ability to tell a story visually. Of course, this is an extremely simplified description, but it is important to note that the two areas are very separate. When drawing an image, an illustrator only needs to consider the compositional and design choices for that one image. A sequential illustrator has to make the same considerations to multiple images on a page (panels), and consider these rules again in the design of the overall page (Janson 2002, 87) with the emphasis in the storytelling. Jack Kirby notes that a good artist is "one with imagination and the ability to tell a good story. How well a man draws cuts no ice with me, if what he's trying to express comes out vague and choppy" (Kirby cited in Morrow 2004a, 181).

Comic book artists need to consider not only the graphical elements and rules that make up an image (such as composition, perspective, rule of thirds, positive/negative space, readability, etc.) but also consider the camera (or view point (Stelfreeze, cited in Talon 2007, 89)—what elements should the audience see to best serve the story, and how can you show it in not only an entertaining way, but also in a way that considers the balance and readability of the panels surrounding the image, and the overall page as a whole. The comic book penciller, no matter if they are working solo or in collaboration with others, is in many ways like a film director, as suggested by Howe (2012):

> …He [Jack Kirby] was in a sense, the director of the films they [Lee and Kirby] made together, composing each shot and driving the narrative with the momentum of the images… (Howe 2013, 64)

The comic book penciller needs to visualise the world and scene (a three-dimensional space) that the story takes place in, using an imaginary camera that is shifted around or edited at a pacing that serves the mood of the story. The aforementioned books, as well as a myriad of others such as *Framed Ink: Drawing and Composing for the Visual Storyteller* (Mateu- Mestre 2010) and *Making Comics: Storytelling secrets of comics, manga and graphic novels* (McCloud 2006), discuss the various camera and shot types that can be, and are, used in comic book storytelling. As comic book and storyboard artist W. Chew Chan explained to me while providing feedback on some of my studio work, there is only a finite selection of shots and angles you can realistically use when visually telling a story with clarity and meaning the reader/viewer is either above the eye line (looking down on the subject), on the eye line (on the horizon, straight on/level with the subject), or below the eye line (looking up at the subject). The camera performs the same function as in a film or TV[59], so this line of research shifted to the discussion of the page with this film language being universally accepted as an important understanding that the penciller must be aware of. Particularly, when breaking down the script/preparing to draw the story. An example of this is comic book artist Brian Stelfreeze discusses his paneling technique deriving from cinema, such as the methods of Alfred Hitchcock (Talon 2007, 95). Camera choice is a huge factor, but what elements make that choice stand out to the reader in terms of layout and drawing?

> ... Every story I ever drew was like being the director of a film. (Gene Colan, cited in Schumer 2012, 9)

Selecting a camera and designing the page for visual appeal and pacing is done during the thumbnailing and roughing stage of pencilling; it is somewhat intuitive in nature, and better refined through practice and an understanding of what cameras and compositions convey in meaning. John Romita Jr. discusses his development in comics and storytelling:

> …When I started working in the business, writers still weren't that thorough with their storytelling, and I would add too many panels…I spent too much time on the moody scene in the beginning of the book, and I ran out of room at the

[59] Even the book *Framed Ink* by Mateu-Mestre [2010] links the camera conventions, and using dynamic camera storytelling, to both a section on film and a chapter on comics and graphic novels.

> end of the book!…Then I realised I had to thumbnail the whole story out into notes with panels, to make sure that the pacing was proper throughout the book. (cited in Cooke 2002, 23-B)

The thumbnailing stage is also the point where the penciller works out the design for the page. While the penciller is the director of the story, they are also actors, art designers, choreographers, and storytellers in their own right. When thumbnailing, the penciller is planning how the camera moves through the story, what is shown (and what is not), the design of the characters, the settings, the posing, the focal point, and of course, beyond the other mediums of storytelling, the balance and design of the page as all these elements are juxtaposed together. Comic book artist Nicola Scott discusses this planning in relation to her process:

> When I'm thumb-nailing each page I'm blocking the scene, a basic theatre technique. When I'm roughing out all the characters, I act out all the parts to see if there are any interesting ways to play it. Not every argument has to have screamy [sic] faces, not every pleasantry is delivered with a smile (cited in Hennon 2013).

Clarity is continually touted as the "ultimate goal" of the penciller in regards to storytelling (McCloud 2006, 37). The audience must be able to follow a story, much like they would if following a movie; if the editing or shot selections are poor, then confusion leads the audience to be pulled out of the story. Lack of clarity in panels and eye flow leads to lack of empathy for the characters, and confusion in reading. From writers to artists, clarity is the ultimate consideration in comics- you must "serve the story" (McCloud 2006, 33):

> Clarity is the best single word to describe good storytelling. (Dick Giordano, cited in Talon 2007, 65)
>
> To me, the most important thing about comic book art is that what's going on the page be instantly clear to the reader. (Randy Strandley, cited in Talon 2007, 33)
>
> I like my stories to be as clear as possible…I sacrifice superhero dynamic by doing clear storytelling. (Mike Wieringo, cited in Talon 2007, 40)
>
> I couldn't draw the way they teach you in school. To me, realistic detail was boring and unimportant. The reader wants to see the close-up, bird's eye view of the action. You have to decide which you want, a well-designed book of pictures or a great story. (Jack Kirby, cited in Morrow 2004, 44)

The skill of storytelling seems to be one that takes perpetual practice and learning. The comic book artists whom I have researched are those renowned for their excellent storytelling skills. But what does it actually mean to be a good storyteller? Comic artist Chris Moeller discusses this:

> There are considerations comic book artists have to consider that a straight illustrator doesn't. A straight illustration works differently than a comic book page; you understand without dialogue. Much of the function of straight illustration is different. (cited in Talon 2007, 128)

In my exposure to both amateur and professional artists in comic books, I recognise that there are artists who can create a very good single image or pin up image, but not be able to communicate clearly the action that is taking place in a story. Mike Wieringo spoke about his early experience with breaking into comics, and the recommendations to focus on storytelling effectively (particularly a storytelling focus when submitting samples), as editors were not that interested in seeing pin ups (Dezago & Nolen-Weathington 2006, 28). Through unimaginative or boring camera choices (such as all the same camera choice/angle, same size use of figures on the page, poor understanding of how certain camera choices in film and comics can add emotional weight and characterisation to a scene, and so on) or juxtaposing panels that make no sense to the overall flow of the story, even the best artists can fail in creating a clear and entertaining comic to read; "…How many brilliant stories are destroyed by art that fails to maximize the moments and throws the readers out of the story?..." (Mike Carlin, cited in Talon 2007, 22).

The core of pencilling entails thumbnailing, rough pencils, and then creating the final art based on this pre-planning process. The penciller is an important element to the storytelling process, and visual readability of the story. In relation to the plot/script, although the story is (and should be) the primary focus of a good comic book, it can be said that a bad story can be lifted by good illustration, but as mentioned earlier, a good story can be killed by bad artwork (Talon 2007, 22). It is about planning and designing:

> You want the ending to be something that is going to carry the reader into the next page or book. There are a lot of design and storytelling elements that are going on in scripting the page; the thumbnails make that concrete and working with the panel structure can help. (Chris Moeller, cited in Talon 2007, 126)

In superhero comics in particular, the focused element of entertainment is also a concern of the penciller. When choosing camera angles, and making graphic decisions in composition, the penciller aims to convey interesting camera choices, and dynamic action, acting and posing to serve the story, and maintain the reader's interest not only for that issue, but subsequent issues. Action is a staple in the genre, and many of the storytelling traits have been adopted by some of the more influential and inspiring artists in the field. Among them is Jack Kirby; because of the visual language he brought in terms of figure/pose dynamics, storytelling pacing, themes in his works,

grandeur and scale, and physical elements that added impact to his imagery. Comic artist Joe Quesada, Editor-in-Chief of Marvel Comics from 2000 to 2011, stated Jack Kirby's relevance: "Jack's legacy is seen in every page of superhero sequential art today" (cited in Ro 2004, 289).

There is a level of conscious functionality created on the part of the penciller in order for the subconscious flow of the narrative on the reader's part. Comics are an interactive medium, which involves more engagement from the audience than a film requires, as Brian Stelfreeze attests to: "…Visually, the movie-goer doesn't have to do anything, they're not a participant, they're an audience…The artist makes up the story, and the reader makes up the space between here and here…" (Talon 2007, 96). In order to keep the reader in the story, superhero comic panels are not only dynamic but are also often designed so that the flow of the action (or panel to panel) complements and encourages continual reading of the story (Janson 2002, 61). In a western sense, this means looking and reading (image and text) left to right, top of the page to bottom, and leading to the next page (Talon 2007, 51). Interrupt this flow and the reader is taken out of the story as they consciously try to figure out what goes next, or are confused by the design layout or orientation of the page. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, such as Scott Snyder and Greg Capullo's *Batman* #5 (Lindsay 2012) which changed not only the page orientation, but also the layout itself, forcing the reader to turn the book upside down and sideways to read it (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.52 – 1.56). This was due to the story and the effects the character was suffering, drawing the reader into the mindset and action, rather than just an arbitrary change, or production department error. It is an entertaining and effective example of knowing the rules in order to break them. In relation to layouts, comic illustrator and editor Dick Giordano states, "If the cuteness ['flashy' panel layouts] makes it harder for the reader to understand what's going on, I will opt for more traditional panels" (in Talon 2007, 66).

In order for the subconscious readability to occur, the penciller needs to ensure that not only do the camera choices suit the mood and information that needs to be presented in the story[60], but also the consideration of the composition of the individual panels, and the pages themselves (Janson 2002, 61). Tiers of panels need to support this flow, particularly if a new scene/new idea is introduced. Placing these panels side by side with no intention of juxtaposing to create a new meaning can confuse the reader (Janson 2002, 60). Again, the composition of the overall page is important in this instance, not

[60] As comic book artist Brian Stelfreeze refers to in Talon 2007, 93.

just for the overall image, but for the meaning in the story. A common mistake made by early-career pencillers is to be too ambitious in experimenting with their page layouts, resulting in too many overlapping panels, oddly shaped panels, overlapping elements and an overuse of breaking borders (where a figure or contents of a panel goes outside the panel border). These can interrupt the flow and confuse the eye when trying to read a page (Janson 2002, 69; McCloud 2006, 33). The breaking border technique can be a useful emphasising tool when used sparingly—usually, to draw the eye to a particular element on the page (an example of this in John Romita Jr.'s pencilled page for *Wolverine* in Appendix 1 Fig 1.30). It would be the equivalent of using capital letters in every sentence and ending them all with exclamation marks. Though Jack Kirby's very early work with Joe Simon on *Captain America Comics* (Timely Comics, 1940) experimented with wild page layouts, panel gutters and breaking borders (a first for the medium at the time, see Appendix 1 Fig 1.03), Jack Kirby changed his layouts over time, and, by the 1960s, his layouts were almost grid-like and extremely conservative (typically an evenly based 6-panel page, 3 tiers, 2 panels per tier, or a page divided into quarters for a 2 x 2 layout, such as Appendix 1 Fig 1.30). Jack Kirby exemplifies a penciller who drew some of the most dynamic and action-packed scenes in superhero, action and science-fiction comics without resorting to free-form layouts, or breaking borders with figures. As Klaus Janson states in *The DC Comic Guide to Pencilling Comics* (Janson 2002, 63), it forces your eye to move into the panel to enjoy the composition, and makes for clean, clear storytelling. Comic illustrator and inker Mike Royer affirms this:

> In drawing, my concern is good visual storytelling. A page design, despite the number of tiers and panels that a reader knows to follow in sequence that is drawn in an interesting and exciting way and contains graphic elements that guide the reader into the exact place one wants the eye to go to FIRST in the NEXT panel. Jack Kirby and Russ Manning were masters at good storytelling and I like to think I learned well from these two. It's a design thing… (Mike Royer, e-mail message to author, 18 February 2012)

Illustrator David Yardin discusses another subtle, but important, theory to compositional considerations of panels, and overall page layout. In a series of videos showing a time lapse of him illustrating (pencilling and inking) a one-page story featuring the superhero character *Colossus* from *the X-men* (Yardin 2010). Yardin shows how from the thumbnailing to roughing stage, his conscious effort to draw the reader's eye towards not only the focal point in the panel (adhering to the rule of thirds/compositional considerations) but also with an effort to have elements within the

panel lead the viewer's eye to the next panel. This was also applicable to leading the viewer's eye to the next tier on the comic page, and in the case of his page in question, the large heroic shot/pose of *Colossus*. This was the main emotional or key image for the page, which was emphasized further by the pose breaking the bottom panel guttering. Thus, although the reader's eye flowing from left to right and top to bottom of the page is subconscious, the artist still makes the conscious attempt to lead their eye, and try to keep them on the pleasing layout of the overall page. The consideration of layout and panel composition is so that the reader's natural eye is not hindered by leading their eye off the page or in the wrong direction with a poorly planned and executed image element or shape. Comic artist Brian Stelfreeze confirms:

> The way a policeman directs traffic, the sweep of the cape or shadow, the glance of a character's eye, or the position of a body can subtly lead the reader towards the next panel. (cited in Talon 2007, 99)

Thus, despite there not being a definitive layout format, the layout must be readable and balanced in terms of the overall sense of the composition (traditional grid, or free form) in order to guarantee the sought-after clarity. As Dick Giordano said in *Panel Discussions,* "All the panels have to work together to keep the reader going onto the next page" (cited in Talon 2007, 75).

Not only must a panel composition adhere to illustration rules such as the rule of thirds, and being engaging in its own design, camera selection and information presented, but it also must be balanced in the context of the other panels and artwork on that page too. "Balanced", as Klaus Janson explains (Janson 2002, 94), is related to both symmetrical compositional choices, such as the layout of shapes, images etc. on a page, but also asymmetrical choices, such as a panel containing a shape on both side of a panel (or tone/contrast); they might be unequal in size, but their presence or relationship to one another creates the balance (Janson 2002, 94-96). Manipulating elements create the various meanings, interests and contrasts that support the storytelling function of the artwork. If the sum total of the panels on a page contains prominent objects/focal points or objects that seem unbalanced, then the page may be perceived as lop-sided; a reader may speculate that this so-called decision on the penciller's part is a plot element, or aspect of the character or situation that may not be occurring in the scene at all, or just find it unappealing because of the poor execution of the artwork. A lop-sided page, like

a black frame between a poorly cut scene, or a 180-degree rule[61] error in a poorly made film, is strange and can be jarring to the reader, thereby taking them out of the story

For example, in film, often a camera's diagonal tilt can indicate disorientation, a surprise, or that dynamic action is about to, or has just, occurred. However, if a penciller's poor compositional choices in individual panels creates too many diagonals on a page, leaning the perspective of main objects in the frames towards the same side, this can create an overall feeling of unbalance. The reader might feel that the comic book story world is "falling over", and a sense of accidental disorientation is inappropriately given to the scene being shown (Janson 2002, 104):

> Creating a good composition is a question of following your own unique instinct. Every artist has his or her own approach. Be aware of these theories, but only refer to them as a guide to some possible resolutions to your compositional problems. Trust your instincts! (Janson 2002, 95)

Thus, the research confirms that many of the penciller's considerations lie in composition. Klaus Janson (2002), for instance, discusses the power of a diagonal (or an angled line) in creating movement, leading the eye of the reader, and being used to create a "greater sense of depth and three-dimensionality" in comic book work (Janson 2002, 97-99). This links with balance, which links with the rule of thirds in drawing, which links all together in the *design* of a page, as if design and storytelling are inseparable in relation to comic book visuals. Renowned comic creator Will Eisner states:

> The artist, like a stage director, must select [in the panel] the point where the reader's eye will first focus and build his composition from that point. The result will be design enough. (cited in Talon 2007, 195)

2.4.2: Consideration of Pacing

> *The audience is going to be dragged through that movie at 24 frames per second. But in the comics medium, the reader is in complete control of the experience, and can focus upon a single panel to absorb all of the information that it contains for as long as necessary.*
>
> (Millidge 2011, 304)

An element that comics tend to have over other visual mediums is the engagement of the audience and the mind itself. The reader pieces together the action that occurs between the panels that the penciller has drawn. Time, though controlled and

[61] Klaus Janson refers to the 180 degree rule as "the action axis" (Janson 2002, 106-111)

manipulated to a certain extent by panel length/height and story pacing, is still ultimately controlled by the reader; they are able to view a story however quickly or slowly they wish, and, at any point, can flick forward or backward, or can even linger on a panel or page. Related to this, Scott McCloud observes (1994), "Space does for comics what Time does for film" (McCloud 1994, 7). In terms of design principles, two things are important: the content of the panels (how much detail is shown to the reader) and the physical size on the page (a small panel can be skipped over very quickly, while a large panel might have far more detail for the reader to process). As comic creator Mike Mignola states, "The more detail you put in something the more it slows the reader down. If I can do it with just the shade, it moves the eye along faster" (cited in Talon 2007, 81).

Comic book writer/artist Dan Jurgens (1999) raises another point about smaller panels; "If you break the action down into numerous small panels, you get the effect of slow motion on the page" (cited in Salisbury 1999, 132), which means that the manipulation of the number of panels on a page, and the detail therein, can affect time and pacing. Repetition of an image (such as a Harvey Kurtzman war story where he uses the same image or camera shot multiple times for impact[62] (Kurtzman and Gaines 2006, Talon 2007, 56), or repetition of a camera choice showing a moment-to-moment or action-to-action (McCloud 1994, 73) sequence of panels, such as a Jack Kirby fight scene utilised in *Captain America*, or *Fighting American*[63] (Saffel 2010), can also manipulate pacing. Again, as Scott McCloud articulates in his book *Understanding Comics* (McCloud 1994, 66), this is all reliant on the engagement of the reader as they read from panel to panel, with each panel separated by the guttering for the reader to process each image in turn. Renowned comic book writer Mark Waid sums up this reader engagement with: "What makes comics 'comics' is that you get to control the pace that you read the story" (cited in Fischer 2012).

Scott McCloud refers to the gutters between the panels as performing an act of closure, whereby the reader views across the page, reading the story and seamlessly piecing together in their mind the continuing action (McCloud 1994, 67). This also plays a part in storytelling a particular point, and utilising another unique element of the comic medium: the combination of words and text. This sometimes can create a new meaning (as mentioned previously), which the visual or text alone would not create, but together

[62] See Appendix 1 Fig 1.48 & 1.69.
[63] See Appendix 1 Fig 1.27.

do (McCloud 2006, 140), such as Frank Miller's *Batman: Year One* and Alan Moore's *Watchmen*.

2.4.3: Practical Pencilling Methods

> *Whatever else Superhero comics may have done, they championed figure drawing...*
>
> (Harvey 1996, 100)

Comic books artists' ability to draw accurate anatomy, perspective, composition, etc., is still of paramount importance to publishers in the comic book industry. This seems particularly so for superhero and action comics. Much of the research I located on pencilling related to thinking about clarity and storytelling, laying out the page, and general considerations in readability. However, it would be remiss to research and discuss pencilling in this regard and not consider the most fundamental element of the superhero/action comic page: the line itself. The line creates the objects and forms on the page and defines the clarity of what the viewer is seeing. The most commonly drawn elements are the figures, who are the works' actors. Their poses, the lines that are used to create them, and the image, account for the readability of the panel and the entire page as a whole (and therefore understanding of the story). The "show, don't tell" (Talon 2007, 65) aspect of comic creating is defined by how well the pose (and the settings they inhabit) communicates what the writer and artist intend:

> …The good artist will pick out the line that is important; the line that he thinks you would like to see. A good artist can do something very simple, which I would like to do sometime, instead of putting a whole battle scene into a panel. (Jack Kirby, cited in Morrow 1994, 175)

To work within the framework of good storytelling composition, including leading the viewer's eye to the focal point of the panel, to the next panel, and to convey the emotion of the characters and story, posing characters in comics becomes an important element in the communication and entertainment that the comic story should aim for. Superhero stories in particular rely on dynamic action poses to express movement and power, which Jack Kirby pioneered. As Harvey attests, "In contrast to most comic book Superhero action sequences of the day, Kirby's drawings reverberate with exaggerated movement" (Harvey 1996, 33). Diagonal lines and contraposto through the shoulders and hips, wide leg poses, and large shapes to create the dynamics of the human form all add to the power and action being conveyed on the page.

Will Eisner highlights these points in his book *Expressive Anatomy for Comics and Narrative* (Eisner 2008), indicating that character poses is a grammar; the function of human anatomy is an important aspect to the process of emotion and intent by the comic artist in conveying their story (Eisner 2008, xi). The penciller functions in this capacity as the director or choreographer (as mentioned earlier). They direct the actors to show as clearly as possible, the meaning to gain understanding for the image, and juxtaposing images. The chapter on posture and power is solely dedicated to Jack Kirby and examples of his superhero work:

> Interviewer: You're famous for dynamic action bursting right out of panels.
>
> Jack Kirby: Because I felt that's what happens. If you're at the business end of a fist, that's what you'd see, or if you're involved with a blast, that would be your impression. I felt it would be my own, so I drew it that way. (Morrow 2004a, 133)

Jack Kirby is renowned for this dynamic action, along with the foreshortened and/or exaggerated posing, and comic artists today still emulate this, since it creates powerful drama and connotations in the action and context of the story. Even in the panels with less action, Jack Kirby's figures seem to move with a purpose, further adding to the closure of the story. Poses are not just staged or stagnate; A punch is not just a punch; The drama is created in the movement, and how much the elements of the body (such as the centre line, shoulders and hips, placement of feet) are pushed (Lee and Buscema 1978, 64). Jack Kirby discusses this idea of creating movement:

> Movement to me is everything. Analysing it now as a mature person, to me motion is life. Something that doesn't move is dead, and I instinctively like to live…I like figures that moved, figures that fought and twisted, and there's nothing ugly there. Violence is just well timed dance, a ballet. I'd put myself in these situations, and it would become like a problem- what would happen if I fought five guys, if I fought six guys, and I'd work out the whole problem…(in Morrow 2004a, 173)

The ways a penciller can visually tell a story include posing, strong silhouettes for readability of body language, facial expressions, and the positioning of a characters hands (especially in combination with the appropriate camera angles); "Master these elements, plus the effective use of Words…and you can give birth to characters that readers will believe in and remember for years to come" (McCloud 2006, 62).

The penciller can also utilise scale to create depth (foreground, mid ground and background elements in composition), or contrast to create meaning, emphasis, and visual drama (Janson 2002, 93). For example, drawing a foe larger than a character

creates instant empathy for the smaller person, unless the protagonist is the bigger foe, where the empathy is reversed. Scale has the ability to emphasise weight; power or significance, helplessness or insignificance, depending on the size and space the character or object takes up in the panel (as alluded to as a storytelling device in Mateu-Mestre 2010, 46). An inker would emphasise this through the thickness of the line, and perhaps through spot blacks (see Chapter 2.5.1) /black on white/grey areas (hatching or ink wash) to create a visual contrast. These methods add to the illusion of depth that comic artists try to achieve for storytelling and clarity (Janson 2003, 48-49).

2.5: Completing the Comic Page Visuals

While my studio research required that I engage in all facets of the comic book making process, and evaluate the discussions I held as I progressed (also largely based on the feedback received, and the output in the publishing process), space does not allow me to discuss everything in detail. To reiterate, the focus of my research has been on the storytelling function of comic book creating in a professional sense, and applying these methods where applicable. So, the primary functions of writing the story and visualising the story became the most significant components. This is not to say that inking, colouring, and lettering (which do not even cover print preparation and design elements of the books) are in any way less valuable to the process. On the contrary, they are as important as pencilling. These are considered separate disciplines and professions in the comic book industry, with specialist skills and considerations needed for each. Although there are some professionals who both pencil and ink their own work (or even pencil/ink and colour), generally these are separate disciplines or jobs. The point is, being large disciplines themselves, I needed to focus more on the core comic creating disciplines that I was drawn to, rather than aspects of the process which still rely on the script and/or pencils of a project.

Inking, colouring, and lettering have the same goals as pencilling: visual clarity of the story, highlighting the focal point/key storytelling elements on the page, and leading the viewer's eye. Rather than discuss the primary aspects of these activities in great detail, I will discuss each discipline briefly, and how it is incorporated into the studio practice.

2.5.1: Inking

I knew from the start of the studio work that inking would be challenging for me: as a separate artistic career in comics, it was a skill that I had rarely considered or practiced at all. A poor inking job can ruin the best pencils (such as the affect of inkers such as the "…inconsistent, often shoddy…" Vince Colletta verses Mike Royer on Jack Kirby's pencils in the 1970s (Hatfield 2012, 29)), and since I wanted the pencils intact to use as feedback material, and I was attempting to save time in the production process, I bypassed this step, choosing to scan and colour from the pencils. Though not a very common practice, it is utilised by artists such as Eric Powell, Ron Garney and Joe Madueira. Inking is an activity that was initially used to aid in the reproduction of the art line work as the old methods for newsprint were quite crude (Morrison 2011, 12). Inking is vital to the clarity of the line work in a comic panel, and therefore clarity to the storytelling. Much like a brick is important to the making of a wall, so too are the lines that are used to create an image in a comic panel. Traditionally, comic pencils lines are cleaned up so that the penciller leaves no confusion to the inker as to which lines/shapes are to be put down on the page, then the lines are delineated or inked in order for them to be clearly reproduced in print, such as the example of Nicola Scott's pencils (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.71). Methods to create depth of field, shadow and lighting, such as creating spot blacks and defining line weights, all play an important role in storytelling, and the perception of the image to the eye. If there is confusion in reading the panel, then the story flow is interrupted, and the artist/s run the risk of losing the reader. Though there are many methods, stages and techniques adopted by every artist, the inked lines indicate to the reader where a light source is, what an object is, and creates/emphasise a sense of depth through contrast. Artist and editor Dick Giordano explains the use of spot blacks:

> The term "spotting blacks" means creating heavy areas of ink on a page which moves the eye in a planned way. Spotting blacks anchors important information on the page. Solid black areas place shadows and differentiate between the three planes of foreground, middle ground and background…an interplay between positive and negative shapes occur. At a quick glance, the eye sees the dark areas and the mind tries to connect them. (cited in Talon 20007, 75)

It is only after my recent experience on working on *The Human Fly* that I am experimenting more with inking. Though I do not have the correct tools for brush inking, I am drawn to the pen/marker inking that Joe Kubert, Mike Mignola and Colin Wilson have used in elements of their work. While this approach makes it hard to

emulate the wet look or weighted lines that artists such as Joe Sinnott, Mike Royer, Klaus Janson (and Joe Kubert at times), are able to achieve with the use of a brush, I have found the challenge rewarding in a sense of the stronger visual clarity I have been able to achieve in the latest *Soldier Legacy* images. Dark Horse Comics editor Scott Allie suggested I attempt inks after reviewing some of my pencil works from 2012 that he thought did not look finished enough. When I raised my concern with trying inks because of the fear of ruining the pencil line work, Scott Allie stated an editor looking at the work could work out what he/she needed to from the images and could always picture an assigned inker on the work anyway. I find inking a different mindset than pencilling, but the skills to be able to draw in general becomes more important in making choices/corrections to the rough line work and intended detail. It also puts some of the thought process back into the rendering of the images/people/detail.

I was mindful of Klaus Janson's advice that every line must have a purpose (Janson 2003, 80), otherwise you are just adding lines that will create confusion to the shapes you are trying to convey. Inking rules such as "things should look like what they are" (Janson 2003, 38) and line weights in relation to both lighting and where the figures/objects sit in space[64] became my new mindset. Mike Royer's advice regarding line weights encompasses many of the considerations an inker should take into account when delineating pencil lines:

> I tried always to "complete" the penciller's statement, all the while following a rule I've always believed in; THE LINE DEFINES THE FORM [sic]… When I was a Character Art Manager in my last years on staff for Walt Disney Creative Services and was responsible for handing out product art to freelance inkers, my oft repeated instructions included: "Remember…the line DEFINES the form." I don't believe, in most cases, this instruction was understood. Simple things like interior lines weighing more than exterior lines drove me crazy. (Mike Royer, e-mail message to author, 18 February 2012)

Given the above, a figure in the foreground would have a heavier line weight to a figure in the background to emphasise the difference in depth and assist in the clarity of the image, and then the shapes that make up the construction of a figure—say a bicep, which would have interior lines to define the form of an arm—would weigh less (be thinner) than the exterior line used to define the arm itself:

> Deciding to add more shadow to an arm or thickening the line that defines the edge of a leg can give the object more life on the page and reinforce the storytelling. (Mark Schultz, cited in Talon 2007, 62)

[64] An example of Klaus Janson's inks and consideration of line weight is Appendix 1 Fig 1.43.

There are considerable elements to inking that makes the process important for the clarity of the comic book image line. Many comic book readers and casual artists seem to have an opinion on the trace or no trace argument (Janson 2003, 66), and it is a concern I grapple with when drawing over my own pencils. Despite these perception by those not familiar with the factors an inker needs to consider before putting ink on the pencil lines as Janson puts it, this is "irrelevant" (Janson 2003, 66). Rather the debate should be "can draw" or "can't draw" (Janson 2003, 66). Each line must serve a purpose or have a reason to exist on the page. The knowledge of drawing gives meaning to every line. To alleviate this issue too, and streamline the process, I keep the pencils very loose and rough, get the structure down that I feel is important (facial expression, contours), gesture the incidentals (folds in clothing, leaves, grass, clouds, smoke) in a non-specific manner, and leave the rendering and detail to the inking process, so in a sense I am still drawing the picture. This is not uncommon, with artists such as Todd McFarlane (Salisbury 1999, 174-175) describing the same working process. This process was a product of confidence and expediency for the project too—such as on *Spider-man* (1990), when Todd McFarlane was writer/penciller/inker. Steve Ditko would also save much of the detail of his work for the inking stage (Bell 2008, 97) (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.31 & 1.32). Similarly, my decision and experimentation with this approach arose from a need for expediency, and from the idea that I did not want to feel like I was drawing the same image twice. Nevertheless, using this approach, most elements are virtually fully penciled before inking, just not clean. Take, for instance, inker Joe Sinnott's statement regarding Jack Kirby's pencils:

> [*The Jack Kirby Collector* interviewer:] How did Jack's work compare to other penciller you've inked over the years?
>
> Joe Sinnott: No one was ever as consistent as Jack. Jack never left anything to my imagination. There were little things here and there that I changed over the years, but I didn't have to. Everything was there…Kirby, consistently, was the same on every story; it was so detailed. Every black was there; I never had to add a black unless I felt it needed to balance the page a little more. It was loose in a sense but detailed in another sense. You can't say enough about Jack's work. (Morrow 2004a, 229)

Pencilling in modern superhero books tends to try and maintain a super clean line with defined areas to shadow/spot black (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.33, 1.38, 1.40 and 1.71). This is to ensure the penciller's drawings remain as accurate to their intention in the first instance, and the drawing is defined before being presented to the inker to ink (Janson 2003, 67). Often though, the inkers are attuned to the penciller, and make decisions on

line based on their own drawing ability. In this case, a third style of comic illustration occurs; a prime example of this is Jack Kirby and Joe Sinnott's collaboration on *The Fantastic Four*, where the end result was not just straight Jack Kirby and not just straight Joe Sinnott[65] (Janson 2003, 66). Inker Mike Royer is often cited as the inker who was most faithful to Jack Kirby's work, (Evanier 2008, 179) inking much of the penciller's work in the 1970s[66], and some assignments in the 1980s. Despite this requirement of faithfulness, the inker is still an active participant and has a visual signature on the final output. Tracing with no knowledge of drawing, lighting or depth will result in work that is stiff and dead. It is a task unto itself in the assembly-line production of comics, but an important function to the overall story:

> As an inker my concern is to complement, not change (unless expressly told to) the pencil artist's statement. It was, in most cases, my good fortune to ink artists who understood "good storytelling." The few that didn't…well, one just "Shut up and inked!" (Mike Royer, e-mail message to author, 18 February 2012)

2.5.2: Colour

When it came to colouring comic book images for my work, the focus was on just learning to work comfortably with colours. Much like what was said about inking, illustrator Jim Steranko said of colouring, "good colour can make a bad image *appealing* and…bad colour can *destroy* an extraordinary image" (cited in Chiarello and Klein 2004, 9). Colouring needs to complement the storytelling and clarity of the panels, suit the mood and atmosphere of the visuals, and not hinder the readability of the page; "Colour is an important storytelling tool…colouring must fit the mood" (Mike Mignola, cited in Talon 2007, 84).

Because of my lack of colour knowledge, I was concerned with falling victim to garishness. Much like comic book illustrator John Higgins's approach to his colour work, as in the influential graphic novel *Watchmen*[67] (Moore and Gibbons 1986-1987, 2008), I wanted to experiment with colour to "enhance the mood and the drama of the story" (Gibbons et al. 2008, 171). I based my application of colour around the fundamental principles outlined by colourist and editor Mark Chiarello: "hue, complementary colours, value, intensity, and colour temperature" (Chiarello and Klein 2004, 15). Mark Chiarello outlines some of the questions faced by colourists:

[65] See Appendix 1 Fig 1.73 for example.
[66] See Appendix 1 Fig 1.72 for example.
[67] See Appendix 1 Fig 1.53 – 1.54.

> When does a colourist go for the bright colours? Or when does a colourist go for muted colours? These decisions are determined by the storytelling. The colourist has the ability to heighten any moment in the story at any time. Focus created through colour can accent a panel or an element within the panel. (cited in Talon 2007, 182)

Colour is traditionally the comic book after thought; before the 1980s, colourists were not even credited—even long-time Marvel Comics Silver Age colourist Stan Goldberg (Dueben 2012). Further, colouring was left until the very end of production (often with tight deadlines), and it was often left to non-colourists or the printers to determine colouring on pages (Chiarello and Klein 2008, 8). Thus, the early colourists were not focused on enhancing the storytelling and creating focus with their aspect of the work; it was more so a case of the making sure the heroes and villains were coloured appropriately, as Stan Goldberg alludes to (Dueben 2012). The paradox that *Watchmen* artist Dave Gibbons mentioned is that although colouring is the final contribution to the comic book pages, it is the first feature of the work to have impact on the reader (Gibbons et al. 2008, 164). John Higgins's work on *Watchmen* particularly inspired me because it was experimentation in itself; not in skill, but in the colour choices John Higgins made with each scene, character and overall colour scheme to the book. Discussing his contribution to *Watchmen*, John Higgins (2008) notes how the book was intended to be different to the other comics that were on the newsstands in the 1980s. The four colour print process and general technology (printing and paper) in those days allowed for only a limited number of colours to be used—originally 63, then 124 by the 1970s (Chiarello and Klein 2004, 13). Further, superhero books tended to feature mainly primary colours because of the outfits worn by the superheroes, such as *Superman* in red, yellow and blue, *Batman* in blue and yellow, *Spider-man* in red and blue, and so on (Dueben 2012). Conversely, Higgins designed his colour palette and the world of the characters in *Watchmen* using secondary colours (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.55). The colouring was complex in thought process at the time because not only did it deviate from simple primary colouring approach, but also characters and objects were coloured to show how they were affected by the environmental light within the book. Thus the character *Dr. Manhattan's* blue glow would affect the colour of the other characters and environment close to him. John Higgins also notes how an object that appeared in a character's kitchen (under neon lights) would be coloured slightly differently when appearing later in the book in a more naturally lit setting (Gibbons et al. 2008, 166, 171). The advent of digital colouring has allowed a new level of possibilities in what colourists are able to achieve with colour, going from a flat colour

application to fully rendered "cut grad" style with a far more expansive range of colours (Chiarello & Klein 204, 66 - 71). These considerations of colour application become much easier to apply to pages, with overall colour schemes a matter of clicking the mouse and mixing the right level of colour via software application tools:

> The weakest colourists are the guys who get all the uniforms right. By that I mean the colour of the sky is blue… and the colour of the grass is always green, always doing the pedestrian job. (Mark Chiarello, cited as Talon 2007, 173)

I tried to keep Mark Chiarello's comment above in mind when colouring *The Soldier Legacy*, the *Dark Detective: Sherlock Holmes* back up feature[68] and *The Maleficus Seven* back up feature. That is, the setting and time of day (see Appendix 2 Fig 2.08 & 2.09 for example), whether there was a source of light or overwhelming natural feature in the scene that would affect the characters (such as an explosion, fire, molten material, underwater, smoke) all played a part in the way I applied colour to the uniforms, skin tones and the like. For each issue, I attempted to apply the colour differently, and, like John Higgins, to think about how scenes differentiate themselves from each other by colour, and how the mood of the characters should affect the colour chosen. In *Watchmen: Chapter 6*, the character known as *Rorschach* is arrested, and over a period of time, tells his life story to a prison psychiatrist. The colour in the room over the course of the issue slowly becomes darker, reflecting the despair of *Rorschach's* upbringing and bleak view of the world, and how this slowly comes to change the perception of the psychiatrist (Gibbons et al. 2008, 171). As colourist John Van Fleet recognises "Colour can also highlight a character's emotional state" (cited in Talon 2007, 171).

With each issue of *The Soldier Legacy*, I became a little more confident in applying colour and attempted to experiment based on how imaginative John Higgins's colour work was in projects such as his *2000AD*/*Judge Dredd* work in the 1980s, and solo work *Razorjack* (1999). Colourist Dean White was an inspiration for the way he applied his digital colours in works over John Romita Jr. and Klaus Janson's illustrations on such projects as *The Amazing Spider-man* (2008), *Captain America* (2012), *The Avengers* (2010), and *The Punisher: Dark Reign* (2009) one shot[69], with an almost painted quality to the work (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.56 & 1.57). His experimentation with colour methods were also inspirational, in particular his work on Jerome Opena's

[68] The second, smaller extra story that features after the main story backs in the back section of a traditional comic book issue. Hence, back up feature.
[69] A one-off issue. Does not denote a continuing series or story arc.

artwork in *Uncanny X-Men*, where he rendered white highlights (or white line), adding an extra level of depth to the colour rendering (Alimagno 2012). His use of colour was very emotive, and it was something I noticed that I was attempting in my own work from issue 3 and 4 of *The Soldier Legacy* (see Appendix 2 Fig 2.05 & 2.06). I was conscious of the fact that the jungle and the uniforms of the soldier characters were very green, so I tried to apply other colours to distinguish the characters from the background. Rim lighting and secondary light sources using colours from fires and explosions, reds and the like, were employed in this attempt to amplify the emotion and intensity of the particular action scene at the time, and inject colour to differentiate the scenes. I tried to incorporate colours in the same vein as Jack Kirby's explosive lines, "Kirby krackle" (Hatfield 2012, 69), and other impact elements that he brought to the visual language of his action pages, highlighting characters' surprise, contact in a fight and other elements of the illustrations that would not actually exist in that world or come from any established light source, but purely exist in the context of the comic book illustration itself—not unlike a sound effect or speech bubble.

Like John Higgins, comic artist Chris Moeller notes that "When a setting is associated with a particular colour scheme, it makes the transition to another scene as simple as creating a new colour scheme" (Moeller, cited in Talon 2007, 128). Thus, I tried to keep the World War two soldier scenes in the overall colour palette different to the present-day young soldier scenes, but always attempting to keep a small element of colour in terms of the overall scheme that links the scenes, settings and locations. Time of day has an effect on the work's colour and lighting (particularly the change in the World War two story, with issue 2 starting in daylight, ending in dusk, issue 3 going from dusk to nighttime, issue 4 in night, and issue 5 from pre-dawn to dawn), which were informed by the different connotations different colours have, the temperatures of colour, and what colours complement each other (Chiarello and Klein 2004, 26-27).

With part 3 of *The Soldier Legacy's Strange Tales* #1, I had an opportunity to explore extremes with colours[70], and I applied a rich usage of warm colours on the main figures (given too, the hot molten metal within the environment, which was emphasised because of the connotations of red with danger), but also using white highlights around the body, referencing Dean White (not small white line brush strokes, but more lightly scribbled on in patches) to create the extra line weight. Again, I attempt to use highlight colours such as white and yellow to emphasise impact and distinguish the characters

[70] See Appendix 3 Fig 3.28.

from their environment backgrounds. As touched on previously, the experiment was a twofold attempt: creating focus in panels through colour and highlighting the characters' state of mind within the action unfolding (Talon 2007, 171), much like the way John Higgins expressed colour throughout *Watchmen*.

2.6: Lettering

> *How I learned to tell stories was all from [John Romita Sr.], the process of doing it and putting notes in the borders to describe what I was doing. He said something to me once: "You shouldn't rely on the notes or the writer's balloons…"*
>
> (John Romita Jr. cited in Cooke 2002, B-24)

Lettering is another separate profession and craft within the comic book page-making process, with some famous practitioners including Art Simek and Sam Rosen from the Silver Age era. Lettering is a mixture of visual element and the writing aspect of the storytelling. While it is essentially the words of the writer, being physical aspects of the page means that composition, visual style and page balance need to be considered to ensure complete clarity, suitability in conjunction with art style, and readability of a page (Talon 2007, 20 – 21). As John Romita Jr. (2002) suggests in the previous quote, a good penciller will attempt to avoid relying on the letters or copy to tell the story that they should be able to convey purely with images, but what the lettering should do is add an extra layer of detail to the storytelling, whether it be subtext to the action or conversation taking place, adding humour, juxtaposing ideas to create new meaning, giving insight into what the main protagonist is thinking, etc. Word balloons and captions are not an excuse for the penciller to slacken in their task. The art must work without the words, but the words and art together add a new level of readability, something that only comics can achieve. Scott McCloud poses a question that he suggests creators consider when writing and making comic books that I believe is a fundamental consideration when adding lettering: "Are both pictures and words contributing something of value to each panel?" (McCloud 2006, 141).

Through my research, I discovered two aspects to lettering: the physical attributes to the word balloons, captions and sound effects, such as fonts, size, colour, and how they interact with the illustration on the page, and the theory behind the way words and images combine on the page. Scott McCloud covers this in his books *Understanding Comics* (McCloud 1994), and *Making Comics* (McCloud 2006). Specifically, Scott

McCloud identifies seven word-and-picture combinations that are commonly seen in comic books (McCloud 1994, 152-155). Some are less common in modern superhero comic books, such as the third one. The seven categories are paraphrased below (McCloud 1994, 152-155):

1. Word Specific is when the words provide all the reader needs to know, and the panel image merely illustrates an aspect of the scene being described. It allows storytellers to condense information into a small area, to potentially get a whole caption of information and history out in a few words, with an image to touch on an aspect of this. This category is great for first- and third-person narration to bring a reader up to date quickly at the beginning of a new story or scene (McCloud 2006, 131).

2. Picture specific relies more heavily on the image to tell the story, with the words merely accentuating the image. One example is Will Eisner's short comic *Casting Call* (Eisner 2008, 75), which is essentially a silent comic, except for the onomatopoeias from the tap dancer's shoes ("Tickety Tak Tickety Tak") (See Appendix 1 Fig 1.74).

3. Duo-Specific is when words and pictures describe the same message; this is perhaps more like the superhero comics of the 1950s, such as *Superman*, where the dialogue says what the character is actually doing in the image (Binder et al. 2005).

4. Intersecting combinations are when words and pictures include some of the same information, but each adds details either cannot cover by themselves (McCloud 2006, 136). An example from *The Soldier Legacy* would be from issue 2 where the character needs to make an escape off a cliff by launching a grenade into a group of enemies. The character does not mention the grenade or the plan directly, but discusses with the rescued Australian soldier "Can you swim?...Get ready to jump… Aim high, pray I don't miss" etc., with the images showing the actions without stating in the words. Nevertheless, the words themselves add aspects of the character and his mindset. The images partially make sense with the words, and the words partially make sense without the images.

5. Interdependent combinations are, according to Scott McCloud, not as common as some of the other combinations, but are interesting in a sense of the drama and meaning that they can create (McCloud 2006, 137). Essentially, it is when words or captions say one thing, the picture shows another, and the combination of the two achieve an overall meaning that either cannot achieve alone. Examples in my studio work include

instances where if you read the words in the panels alone they would seem harmless, but accompanied by the image they are given another meaning. For instance, when the character *Lazarus Burne* (in the back up story *The Maleficus Seven* in *Soldier Legacy's Strange Tales* #1) is slamming the (possessed) priest's head into a bowl of communal holy water, but is saying "You seemed to have got a little messed up, Padre…maybe we can get the stains out." The words alone may seem benign, even friendly. The picture suggests otherwise.

6. Parallel combination is where words and picture do not connect at all, but may blend together in a later panel (McCloud 2006, 138). This can be used if dialogue transitions from one scene to another, or to create a layered story in general. I experimented with this, based on Jeph Loeb's example of character narrative in comic books such as *Batman: The Long Halloween* (Loeb and Sale 2008) where Batman is visually in a fight scene, but the caption boxes say "I remember my father", and tells another story that seemingly does not have a connection to the visual plot, but gives depth into character. I try this with aspects of *The Soldier,* who, when in battle, recalls football games, experiences with his father or advice from his coach, which has no direct connection to the action taking place.

7. Montage is when words and letters take on a more visual quality, and mix more freely together in a sense of the illustration (McCloud 2006, 139). For example, when Will Eisner incorporates letters and logos into the illustration, such as in his splash pages for *The Spirit*, on his special effects into the artwork (more so than a simple overlay of special effects) (Eisner 2008, 79).

The application behind the lettering of the pages is a consideration made at several points of the comic page production:

- The initial scripting/writing of the story,
- The layout by the penciller, who makes considerations of word balloon and caption boxes space when thumbnailing/roughing,
- When the Letterer letters the page itself.

Brian Michael Bendis suggested, as a writer making adjustments to what dialogue ends up on the page, if the artwork in the panel speaks for itself, he would omit the dialogue/captions for that panel (Bendis 2012). The consideration in theory helps

determine what style and meaning of story you wish to convey as the creator. Knowing how to letter a page can mean knowing when not to add text as well.

In my studio work, I decided not to use the traditional hand lettering method of adding copy to the page—in this instance, a process conducted between pencilling and inking (Chiarello and Klein 2004, 84)—since it takes a separate skill set, a steady hand, and consistent handwriting throughout the book. Rather, I tried to apply lettering digitally once the comic pages were complete. Usually, with a separate letterer, this is done after inking, so that the colourist and letterer can be completing their work simultaneously. Digital lettering (with an appropriate font style to the setting/story, found online), applied with Adobe Illustrator, can save a lot of time; one is able to use consistent, sharply outlined balloons, caption boxes and text (vector-based objects over bitmapped Photoshop images) (Chiarello & Klein 2004, 128 – 130).

When lettering digitally, I kept a number of considerations in mind, some during the pencilling and scripting stage. Giving feedback to me on pencil pages of *The Soldier Legacy* #3 at San Diego Comic-Con 2011, Mark Waid recommended the book *Panel Discussions* (Talon 2007) in which a number of artists discuss lettering and balloon placement specifically. The compositions of the panels not only have to be clear from a visual sense, but also space must be considered for the scripted dialogue, or guessed script dialogue (if lettering on completion). This means that when thumbnailing, the penciller must consider where the balloons will go in relation to the illustrations, much like the examples of page layout plans by illustrator Dave Gibbons for *Watchmen* in the book *Watching the Watchmen* (Gibbons et al. 2008). As comic book writer/artist Mike Mignola suggests: “Instead of pretending the word balloon isn't there, let's embrace them and really break them into the artwork…” (cited in Talon 2007, 82). Considering white balloon placement will ultimately affect the balance of the overall page composition, this made a lot of sense to me. To make the readability interesting, I tried to lead the reader’s eye with the balloons—either in assisting the main focal point of the visual panels, or, in direct contrast to balance accordingly down the page, left to right, top to bottom. Even the more liberal of comic page layouts or illustrations can be made easier to read by balloon placement; overlapping the gutter or panel border into the next consecutive panel helps readability (Chiarello and Klein 2004, 101).

Being the illustrator lettering the work, I was conscious of the fact not to cover elements of the illustration that may hinder the natural comfortable way to read the page from a

visual sense. In general, hands, feet, faces and figures tell the story, so I made sure not to cover them with balloons. Also, basic elements need to be considered in regards to the staging of characters; whether as a penciller breaking down a writer's script, or thumbnailing a plotted story, it is important to consider who is speaking first. This saves less mess with balloon tails and order placement. Scott Hampton notes of his practice "I often place the first speaker on the left-hand side of the panel and make sure his balloon isn't cutting across someone's face" (cited in Talon 2007, 103).

My primary consideration of digital lettering was ensuring it did not look amateurish and let down the look and appearance of the comic. This meant selecting the appropriate fonts for captions, dialogue and sound effects, making sure the balloon tails stayed consistent within the comics, and squaring off the oval-shaped balloons, so that they have that classic comic book look, where the extra space not used by words inside the balloon is utilised (McCloud 2006, 203). As a reader, I am annoyed when I see radically different tail thicknesses throughout a comic book, tails that do not point towards the head of the people speaking, balloons that overlap a speaking character's head when there is enough room in the panel to adjust or trim the balloon to the shape of the panel border, balloons that are long ovals of block text, but large white spaces either side of the paragraph (not squared off), or balloon placement that has not considered the natural reading flow of the reader of the comic page. Another infelicity is fonts that are difficult to read. I learnt this the hard way, when the first *Solider Legacy/Sherlock Holmes* cross over back-up story in *Dark Detective: Sherlock Holmes* #8 was released (2012), and the font choice for the villain was unsatisfactory. Fortunately, I was able to change this for the reprint of the entire three parts in *The Soldier Legacy's Strange Tales* #1. Strange fonts and balloons can also highlight "bad lettering" choices (McCloud 2006, 2002). I take the same considerations when selecting fonts, size and colour of sound effects, as influential artist Walter Simonson suggests: "Type style can give the sound a distinct personality" (cited in Talon 2007, 147).

What I liked about being able to reprint the first couple of issues of *The Soldier Legacy* (first when I went onboard with publisher Black House Comics, and then when producing the trade paperback collected edition) was that I was able to readjust the earlier experiments with lettering and balloon placement to correct my typographical and font size errors. I had to take an educated guess when the different fonts were involved to make sure that the sizes produced in the printed version looked close to the size of the fonts that appear in the average superhero comic. My primary concern was to

ensure the illustrations were not hindered, particularly those that took a long time to draw; it would be pointless to arbitrarily place a balloon or caption box over such an image, much like Colleen Doran's example of a letterer who completely covered an intricately drawn chandelier with a word balloon in one of her projects (Doran 2011). Being the illustrator, I was aware of the spaces I allocated when laying out pages, and adjusted accordingly when it came time to dialoguing.

In the case of using the Marvel method with Christopher Sequeira (see Appendix 3), I would thumbnail, layout, and illustrate the pencils based on our or his (depending on the project or pitch) plot, and would send him the pages on completion/as I went. He would then send back a page-by-page balloon placement guide, with numbered balloons or caption boxes, and a numbered dialogue script of what should go into each balloon on each page. For the lettering work I did on *Dark Detective: Sherlock Holmes* #7, there was already a script that existed for the project, so the guides were just a lightened version of the final art with a pencilled overlay of numbered balloons. Again, being an illustrator, I was conscious of illustrator Phil Cornell's work, and therefore made sure not to carelessly overlap any of his drawings where it was not necessary.

Lettering certainly became another factor in the comic page-making process that could negatively affect a page if the proper consideration was not taken of its role in the storytelling and readability. Although one of the last steps in the process and often completed close to the deadline, the lettering required that I be conscious of what I was doing in relation to clarity of the story.

Chapter 3: *The Soldier Legacy* and Studio Work

> *…One of the things about doing comics is that it's an on-the-job training thing. You're learning as you go along and the wonderful thing I enjoyed was that I could experiment along the way…*
>
> (Will Eisner, cited in Talon 207, 185)

The Soldier Legacy is a comic book I conceived with the early archetypes of the superhero genre closely in mind. The overall project encompasses not only a learning process through the various comic book writer/artist methods, but also a story with personal ties and motivations. For the studio work, I took something that was essentially a single issue origin tale from my Animation Honours year, and decided that I wanted to establish not only an Australian identity in my comic book work, in what is essentially a very American genre (superheroes and masked heroes), but also build on the existing concept of the project and contribute to the local comic community. I wanted to gauge audience reaction by releasing the first book to the public, and then expand on the concept as a serialised story and product. This served not only to build recognition of the character/s and title, but also to market myself as a comic book creator (and build up the profile side of comic books). From a research point of view, it also allowed me to adapt and put into practice the concepts and methods I learned or were suggested to me by industry professionals; the information from the research material, journal articles, analysis of the works, published interviews; and interactions from the sources themselves and seminars and Master classes on the subject of methods and practices, which arose from the studio work output.

Each issue of *The Soldier Legacy*, and work with other writers and editors on other projects, allowed for a new point to apply or experiment with a different work practice, method or skill set learnt from feedback and research. As there was no dominant method of creating comics, experimenting with process became an important aspect in discovering what worked from project to project. And, from publications and output, I was able to gain new insight and access to various areas of the Australian comic book scene (both in comics and pop culture in general), and eventually make contact with and work within elements of the American industry, which was my original intention.

Writing was an aspect of the studio work that became one of the most critical functions of what I needed to achieve at a passable level. I questioned and reflected on my writing constantly, and had to experiment with aspects of the process and the original storyline

based on technical factors, such as deadline and page counts, and creative factors, such as avoiding clichés, following the natural flow of the issue, and re-evaluating what characters would actually do in a given situation. Working solo, working in a collaborative partnership, and working with a licensed character under a larger editorial team posed different methods in writing and storytelling visually; the research allowed me to explore what methods the professionals undertake when writing for comic books. Moreover, the studio work gave me an insight to these methods and the ability to work out what was suitable not only for the circumstance, but also for the individuals in the process.

My initial concept was to make a traditional American genre and art form with an Australian voice. That is, have characters that are not only Australian, but have the comic itself touch on some Australian history; much like the Golden Age and Silver Age of comic books that incorporated American socio-political history (Johnson 2012, 86-102). The idea was to emulate the Stan Lee and Jack Kirby style of Marvel Comics in the 1960s[71], with influences in story, characterisation, and methods of prominent professional artists and writers, to create an Australian story with Australian based characters, touching on Australian history. In particular to Australian content, these are aspects rarely seen at all in American superhero comic books. Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's books from the 1960s were freewheeling in a sense that the action and the adventures were light-hearted in terms of visuals and banter, but were offset with characters who were flawed; human emotion and circumstances sometimes got the better of the protagonists in the series, which made for a more compelling read than the books being published by the competitors at the time (Millidge 2011, 24).

As the research progressed, and feedback and information was provided, I widened the scope of influences of artists, writers and series, on the story and illustration/designs of my own work. These included Jack Kirby's writer/illustrator run in the 1970s on DC Comics's *Our Fighting Forces, featuring: The Losers* (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.51), Harvey Kurtzman's work in EC Comics *Frontline Combat* (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.40) and *Two-Fisted Tales* (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.69) war comics from the 1950s, Will Eisner's war-based graphic novel *The Last Day of Vietnam* (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.46 & 1.47), published by Dark Horse comics (Eisner 2013), Colin Wilson's illustration of the

[71] Particularly the action adventure war comic *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* from 1963 (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.50), and the revival of *Captain America*, Jack Kirby's co-created character from the 1940s, who was revived in the superhero team book *The Avengers* #4 (1964), and given his own series of war time and modern stories in *Tales of Suspense* and then *Captain America*.

Garth Ennis–written *Battler Britton*, based on the British Wartime Comic book character, for WildStorm (Ennis and Wilson 2007) and Joe Kubert's illustrative work on the DC Comics war-time character *Sgt. Rock* (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.49). These series not only helped with visualising and conveying the period of World War two (the mood, the scenes, action), but also with setting the tone in characterisation and storytelling. Though these are different genres to superhero (including some of the inspiration from the *Rawhide Kid*, which a late 1950s to early 1960s Western series illustrated by artists such as Jack Kirby, Dick Ayers and Jack Davis), they still provide most of the inspiration, storytelling and visual approaches to conveying similar subject matters and action myself. Also, it is important to note that superhero comic writers and artists were not exclusively tied to this genre; much of their work in other genres carried over into the type of stories and visuals they created under the superhero banner. For example, much of Jack Kirby's previous work stemmed from a myriad of genres, with which he used the visuals and often the tropes of these books to flavour the superhero comics he would draw and write (such as the romance genre elements in *The Fantastic Four*). The variety of illustration styles, how each artist approached their layouts[72], the line work and their problem solving, such as how they depicted battle, quiet scenes and the like, were helpful to my learning and understanding across the duration of the studio process.

From Harvey Kurtzman's work, which Howard Chaykin recommended to me while providing feedback on *The Soldier Legacy* #5, I learned to use a simple structure of panels to tell stories in. I began to be conscious of the panel-breaking choices I was making (which, in hindsight, did not all make sense, such as a figure in the background breaking a border, whereas an object in the foreground was being cropped by the panel border), and the choices I was making in illustration based on my ability and style. Harvey Kurtzman's work consists of short stories, six to eight pages in length, that have incredibly powerful and "cinematic images" (Kurtzman and Gaines 2006, 144), using camera zooms and moment to moment image choices (McCloud 1994, 70-72) to control pacing, which creates deeper empathy with the subject (through close ups and camera dynamics). Also, Harvey Kurtzman uses simple and effective shapes and lines to create readable but gritty compositions, and first-person narratives to sell the story emotionally to the reader. The line work in particular appealed to me; the stylised or cartoonish approach to the figures (such as in stories *Rubble!*, *Big 'If''*, *Prisoner of War* and

[72] Such as Will Eisner's book *The Last Day of Vietnam*, which had no formal layout in terms of rectangular panels or even defined guttering—the images were still sequential, with an open approach.

Corpse on the Imjin) eased the tense and gritty subject matter the EC Comics tackled in these stories without sacrificing impact (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.69 & 1.70). This was, co-incidentally, Christopher Sequeira's way of thinking in regards to our burgeoning series *The Maleficus Seven*, which tackles horror and supernatural themes using my more stylised or cartoon-like drawing (see Appendix 2 Fig 2.13). The most important lesson I tried to apply from Harvey Kurtzman's work is that interesting and effective stories can still be told from plain layouts (such as the epic tale *Rubble!*, which covers years of time in only six pages), along with the gritty and interesting shapes, bold lines, poses, facial expressions, and simple storytelling which Harvey Kurtzman injected into his war stories (Kurtzman & Gaines 2008, 178). What is interesting too is that all the EC artists working on these books worked from Harvey Kurtzman's stories and layouts—somewhat like Jack Kirby drawing layouts for Marvel artists in the 1960s, except Harvey Kurtzman was in a more editorial and writer-like position at EC in the early 1950s, and was somewhat stricter in what he wanted with the end result (Kurtzman and Gaines 2006, 212).

The difference I was trying to implement in my action-adventure-war-superhero style comic book, and not wanting to retread familiar ground, particularly as the work progressed, and influence gathered, was to add characters that are not always represented in the American books (Australians). Also I wanted to base the comic book in the 1940s, where superhero action comics grew in popularity and readership (The Golden Age)[73], but also within settings other than just a city or war-torn Europe, which most war books feature. It was, and still is, very rare that a comic book story from the main publishers featured an Australian character; in the case of World War two, most books focus heavily on the European theatre, with less than a handful of stories based in the Pacific theatre. This is not uncommon in traditional depictions of Australian hero protagonists in film. As Sheckels suggests "...Suggestion that a heroism appropriate for Australia today will only clearly emerge outside the constraints imposed by the culture on the proving ground provided by warfare." (Sheckels 2002, 43)

Nevertheless, the universal appeal of the superheroes and action heroes of popular culture was something that I kept in mind when creating and writing the protagonists of the comic book. Thus, I wanted to keep the characters human, but introduce Australian traits seen not only in Australian films, but also in Australian history. In Australia, the

[73] Hatfield 2012, 9.

ANZACs[74] are a powerful metaphor for the Australian spirit that never gives up, who are the underdogs, who dig in and fight hard, but above all, who look after their mates—traits that have carried over into our own cinematic heroes. As Sheckels points out "The heroes of old love their mates ... mateship is an important defining characteristic of the Australian culture as a whole" (Sheckels 2002, 12). The Australian hero is not outspoken, or disrespectful, but is also not afraid of having a laugh, with a touch of that larrikinism. "They are doomed to suffer and lose" (Sheckels 2002, 12). The superhero genre has a history of this style of character, particularly the Marvel superheroes of the 1960s. For example, some of these elements can be seen in Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's outcast character *The Thing* (from *The Fantastic Four*) (1962) or Stan Lee and Steve Ditko's *Peter Parker* (*the Amazing Spider-man*)(1962).

In fact, the young hero in my book, (grandson of *the Soldier*)[75] is inspired from Stan Lee and Steve Ditko's early *Amazing Spider-man* stories, where the hero is a vulnerable young man trying to make sense of his new role as a vigilante (see Appendix 1 Fig 1.04 & 1.05). The work also references Lee Falk's *The Phantom* (Frew Publications), an Australian newsagent staple for many years, as I wanted *the Soldier's* deeds in the past to link in some way to the contemporary-set storyline (hence the reference to a legacy, plus, taking into account the hero in a jungle setting, much like *The Phantom*). The idea of a young, physically fit man, with this type of vigilante family lineage, who has a social conscience that spurs him on to make some sort of difference locally, appealed to me on a personal level, as did the grandfather/grandson relationship.

Despite creating something Australian, I know the best heroes tend to be universal in their appeal. For instance, the reason for the appeal of the superheroes previously mentioned is not purely based on their American heritage. Rather, it is because they are entertaining, and an audience can empathise with them, either for their characteristics or skills. This is not restricted to comics; consider Charlie Chaplin's *The Tramp* or Clint Eastwood's *The Man with no name*. Thus, I attempted to develop my protagonists in a way that something of them appeals to the reader. Characters such as *Mad Max*, *Josey Wales*, and *Wolverine* are something not unlike the Australian historical heroes (such as Ned Kelly); they are somewhat anti-authoritarian, and not your conventional hero. Again, Sheckels (in relation to *Mad Max* in particular) states: "Heroism is, therefore, no

[74] Australian and New Zealand Army Corp (A.N.Z.A.C)
[75] See Appendix 2 Fig 2.06.

longer a matter of wearing the right coloured hat" (Sheckels 2002, 173). We are dealing here with vigilantes, after all.

While I aimed to create an Australian action/adventure series, I wanted to keep the world rooted loosely in fact. So, much like Stan Lee basing the antics of the Marvel heroes in New York and real-world settings, I too aimed at keeping the world of the comic as real in dates and places as possible, with a hope that young readers recognise the minor details and take it upon themselves to research topics such as the 9th Division A.I.F, Sattelberg, New Guinea, the Owen gun, Kokoda, Crete, and The Rats of Tobruk. In doing so, they would learn something about Australian history they might not have realised, just as I had to research Australia's involvement in World War 2 when I started this project.

Writer Mark Waid suggests that the first part to comic book writing "is coming up with two or three very strong visual sequences...They don't have to fit together— [and then] slowly start to knit together the story" (Mark Waid, cited in Salisbury 1994, 229). So too, I began to write the series by focusing on a couple of different sequences. The story came from research of the World War two period, and thinking about how certain sequences could escalate in relation to a traditional action narrative structure. But it also came from what I wanted to draw, and what I thought would fit my strengths as a penciller, but still push me to learn and try new things. The writing came from visual research as well as written research, and the process of storytelling also involved trying to decide what would be the ultimate look and feel of the character's environment and settings as the plot solidified. As Todd McFarlane notes, "As an artist, I make the building blocks from the images first...Some of it is, what kind of mood do I want? What kind of atmosphere?" (Todd McFarlane, cited in Salisbury 1999, 169)

Sequences like the inciting incident in issue 2 involving the attempted execution of a P.O.W (prisoner of war) came from a photograph. The feats of the Soldier were inspired by the 9th Division AIF and the events surrounding Thomas "Diver" Derrick, who earned a Victoria Cross for single-handedly clearing ten machine gun posts under fire, allowing his battalion to capture a strategic location (Australian War Memorial 2013). Complications that occurred in the story continued to come from research. The tank that appears in issues 3 and 4 was a unique amphibious tank (Kai-Chi) that proved to be visually different looking than the usual tank you find in other war stories. In the modern story, newspaper articles provided the real life links to the characters and

situations, such as the car gang troubles south of Brisbane, and the (overstated) article[76] involving the fan base surrounding the "clown rap" group Insane Clown Posse and their perceived threat to Australia. The character *Commander Queenslander* is a direct commentary of the obscure real-life costumed vigilante who ran around in Brisbane in 2011, before fading into obscurity (Captain Australia 2015). These sequences and characters were an attempt to give a gradual escalation of conflicts to lead towards the final act of the story. Taking the advice of Frank Miller, "Always know your ending…" (cited in Salisbury 1994, 196), I have the final conflict and aftermath planned out, and the attempt with each issue is to end on a cliffhanger, which is gradually building towards this plan. The main difficulty is the relationship line of the plot, in that although the action of the plot is moving, I want to make sure that the support characters still have their arcs or their part of the story tied up satisfactorily by the end.

In saying this, each issue (#2 – 5, and one-shot) was made by experimenting with different writing methods, in an attempt to find inspiration in creating the story, and discover what would be interesting to me from an attempted art point of view (as well as respond to feedback given). For issue 2, which was essentially Act 1, the idea was to put the characters into a situation that would not only set up the rest of the story arc, but also be seemingly difficult situation for the characters to solve for the next issue (a "hook" (O'Neil 2001, 37) or "cliff hanger"). I literally threw my character into the deep end by throwing him off a cliff, with the challenge of solving that confrontation in the next issue. From this point on, having the freedom of writing and drawing my own work, and knowing how I wanted to end the story (it was just a matter of plotting each issue logically, with a confrontation and a cliff hanger to get there), meant that much of the writing from that point on became more visual in the thumbnailing and layout sense, with dialogue being written based on the visuals, much like the plot driven Marvel method (see Chapter 2.2.2). The fun in this sense was playing off the intended character confrontations I had drawn and trying to determine what each character would say in the circumstance.

[76] See News.com.au article "Violent street clowns hit Sydney- Meet the Juggalos and Juggalettes." 2nd August 2010, and "Red Faces Over Red Noses". Media Watch, Episode 27, 9th August 2010.

3.1: Illustrating *The Soldier Legacy*

As pencilling was my primary ability in comic books, and that which I was mostly trying to improve, I wanted to write something that I would enjoy drawing, and attempt to learn to be a better storyteller. When I began, I did not consider myself to be a strong writer, as each discipline in comics tends to take a great deal of time to get a competent grasp on. I felt in the beginning that I realistically could only give one aspect my full attention, and research the other steps enough to be confident and competent enough to tell a story and understand how the mechanics of telling a story, and characterisation worked. Writing was a necessity, but I knew I wanted to do something bigger than the first issue.

As a solo creator for this series, I chose to write this experimenting with different methods to see what suited me in both time and creative inspiration. Issue 2, for instance, was a full script hybrid, where I wrote down story beats, and described action with a little bit of dialogue where I felt appropriate. Much like the Marvel method, I broke down the sequences into a number of panels and pages, and then added the dialogue once the images were done. This was satisfactory, but I felt that the script format, albeit not quite full script, was a bit time consuming considering I was the only one reading it. I thought, if I was familiar with the story, why not just jot down the beats, and continue from there? So issue 3 evolved to experimenting with how Todd McFarlane plotted and pencilled his own comics, by shifting around the pages/scenes that I felt would increment the plot forward, and end that issue on the appropriate cliffhanger. The sequences planned for issue 4 were made by jotting down the notes, plus the time frame to complete this issue by (as I was going to be a guest of a convention for the first time, and wanted a new issue to sell), which ultimately meant that I gave more space to the World War two aspect of the work, and the modern story became a back up feature. This issue started much like issue 3, in terms of jotting down story beats, but was written more so by drawing; the page thumbnails were drawn up, then roughed onto a full size page when I was happy with the page layout and compositions. It is a method called “Shitagaki”; a method more common in Japan, which Colleen Doran incorporates into some of her own solo written/drawn work. It is basically a “thumbnail style” of writing a page, also utilised by cartoonist Jeff Smith (*Bone*) (Doran 2011). I enjoyed this method, as it virtually means writing the story visually. It was by issue 5 (and, upcoming issue 6) that I became quite comfortable with this hybrid method of story beats (page by page), thumbnailing pages based on the story

beat list, roughing onto large comic pages, and immersing into the mindset and mechanics of the pencilling. Quite often, as was the case with putting together certain issues of *The Soldier Legacy* and *The New Adventures of the Human Fly* story, not only did I have to become comfortable with the process, but I also had to adapt this to a schedule, as illustrator Scott Hampson alludes to:

> Comics is the best profession on Earth for honing drawing skills, because you have to do so much of it. And on the clock! More often than not there simply is no time to noodle every panel, which would be a mistake anyway, and so necessity becomes a virtue. (cited in Talon 2007, 111)

When pencilling, I still tried to adhere to the basic inking principles of line weights from the earlier issues of *The Soldier Legacy*, purely because I wanted to maintain the pencils for future critique without ruining them with attempted inking. Also, I wanted to try and focus as much as I could just on pencilling as a main storytelling discipline, rather than overextending myself (which was somewhat inevitable given the fact that the books had to be assembled solo). I was particularly drawn to the look of colouring applied by colourist Dean White (*Kick-Ass* (c. 2008), *Amazing Spider-man* (c. 2008), and *Captain America* (c. 2013)) who has often worked on John Romita Jr., and early Jack Kirby/ Steve Ditko/ John Buscema covers for the *Marvel Masterworks* editions. I noticed that *Kick-Ass* (Millar 2010) was inked by Tom Palmer without spot blacks, which left the illustration open for White to colour and light accordingly. This appealed to me, considering I was not inking the work, and could not fill areas with black ink (and remembering I was not pleased with the darkened pencil scribble look of the first comic book attempt in my Honours project). Omitting the shading, I focused on clean pencil lines that I was able to scan straight into the computer and, with minor touch ups, colour straight from there (see Appendix 2 Fig 2.07 & 2.08). I used this method for the majority of the studio work, modifying the way that I coloured and pencilled as I became more confident in applying it digitally. This was something I noticed too in Stewart McKenny's original pencils for his DC Comics work—no spot blacks, just the line work open for the colourist to apply flat colour.

Much of the pacing and compositional choices came through a combination of trying to keep the page balanced, keeping a variety in camera choices, clarity in story, and visually appealing to look at. Pose was really important in this sense, as I tried to capture the same dynamics that Jack Kirby put into his figures; it was a point that Todd MacFarlane spoke about when he reviewed my work in 2009. Pose sets the mood of the story through characterisation. Dynamic figures speak volumes, and being an action-

adventure-style book, it was important to me to have the storytelling visually appealing, and display power and emotion through the way the characters were drawn on the page[77]. This, along with the layouts themselves, was the most difficult aspect of the process. The mechanics of drawing was far less taxing, and I found parallels from this process from the way Mike Wieringo spoke about it in *Panel Discussions*:

> "The hardest stage is doing layouts, the absolute hardest stage…Sometimes it will take me a whole day just to do the layout. Sometimes I get it done in an hour. It all depends on how inspired I am…" While working in the smaller size [thumbnailing], Wieringo worries about the pacing and emotional issues rather than how great the figure looks on the page… "I just think about the overall page and what I want to have on the page and how many panels I think it's going to take to tell the scene on that page. I think about which panel or expression, or whatever I want to emphasise, which panel I want to make the biggest, how do I want to break up a certain part of that scene into several little panels, etc. A lot of it is mental and there's a lot of erasing…" (cited in Talon 2007, 44)

The main consideration in pencilling the story was not only for it to be clear and entertaining, but also to create credible pencils I had to ensure the elements I included in each story were researched and referenced, or at least enough for a suspension of disbelief, since the story involves a fictional vigilante running around in the jungle/in the suburbs fighting villains. So, elements such as uniforms, locations, equipment, weapons, and vehicles, were researched to make sure they existed during the time period in question and were somewhat available; for example, the Ka-Chi Japanese Amphibious Tank in issue #3 and 4, for example, was barely in production, and not actually used in Papua New Guinea, but rather in Japan where it did not see any war use. However, it existed and provided a visual contrast to a regular tank. In order to get the feel and atmosphere, I referred to photographs of jungle terrain, camps and soldier uniforms[78], as well as suburban photos of nearby suburbs. Gang members depicted in the story (such as the Juggalos) were all gathered and appropriated into character and location designs. Often, I found myself using a reference to a family member or in certain points, an emotional situation or occurrence in my own life as a reference to the thoughts and actions of the characters depicted. *Barry,* for instance, who first appears in issue 4, as *the Young Soldier's* martial arts instructor, is modelled on my best friend Gary, a fireman and martial arts instructor. In some ways, story beats in the series, comments and situations were written in an autobiographical format. I found these

[77] A point reiterated by Will Eisner in his discussion of Jack Kirby's dynamic figures (Eisner 2008, 127).
[78] From sources such as Lindsay 2003.

elements in the creative process to be something similar to how Jack Kirby described his own process:

> It's a very strange thing; in many of my characters I'll see reflections of my own family. Sometimes, it just comes out that way. And it can be villains, a hero, or a guy in the crowd, and he'll suddenly look like my father or my uncle…An artist draws from his own environment; whatever he sees in his own experience I think comes out in the drawing…(cited in Morrow 2004a, 176)

The Soldier Legacy is a constant work in progress; working as a solo creator, I often find myself experimenting not just in storytelling/writing methods, but also in the way I attempt to apply colour (as previously mentioned in Chapter 2.5). The main colour elements to consider are the level of saturation and rendering, both of which can be affected by the printing of the actual product. CMYK (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, and Black) is the colouring mode created by inks. Application of digital colour involves mixing colours in CMYK mode of a colouring program (such as Adobe Photoshop), however the display is always going to be based on RGB (Red, Green and Blue), as this mix of colour (by light) is how screens display colour. The issue becomes how to account for the change of colours between the monitor and the printed page. Furthermore, the paper stock and texture can affect the end result of the colours that are printed onto it. I found that in the early issues of *The Soldier Legacy*, the printed reproduction of the colour values, saturation and contrast were too dark; it took a few attempts until I was able to work out how best to output the colours to the publisher for a level of printing that I was happy with. Apparently, I am not alone in these concerns; a discussion with John Higgins (2012) over a coloured cover page released in early 2012, promoting his upcoming work on *Before Watchmen: The Crimson Corsair* for DC Comics, revealed "I still have nightmares about [colour] reproduction; the cover for the *Before Watchmen* irritates me, too much saturation, never stops…" (John Higgins, e-mail message to author, 23 March 2012).

What I particularly liked about the ability to re-release print runs or collect issues into a trade paperback (see Appendix 2 Fig 2.04), is that I was able to adjust any discrepancies or problems I had with the colours from the first attempt When producing *The Soldier Legacy: Collected Edition Volume 1*, I discussed the choice of paper with publisher Baden Kirgan, who sent completed proof copies of interior pages to make a decision of the final product. The book ended up being a hybrid of gloss art stock pages for the

colour sequential pages, while the pencil pages for the concept art section were printed on a matte bond stock, as these suited the images printed onto them, respectively.

The next area I experimented in for *The Soldier Legacy* was inking the pages, which aimed to give the finished illustration a more defined look (see Appendix 2 Figs 2.12 & 2.15). At the time of writing, some test pages, a cover and promotional material have been completed. I have observed that the commitment of the inked line is a different element to contend with than a pencilled line, but it does mean the pencilled lines are not necessarily cleaned up for the final product. The role of colour will be slightly different in that the light source will be defined before the colouring begins (due to spot blacks, and line weights), rather than having to make more lighting choices with an open, somewhat thinner, pencil line. How this will affect the perception of the next issue of the comic book by the readers, and professional feedback will be a daunting unknown.

3.2: Solo Writing *The Soldier Legacy* and Working with a Writer on *Soldier Legacy's Strange Tales* & *Dark Detective*

Though much of the research and analysis covers the methods of writing, it is noteworthy that the studio work was written and drawn solo. While this is not uncommon in the history of superhero publications (such as Frank Miller's writer/artist tenure on Daredevil (1979), and Batman*: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), Jack Kirby's post 1960s work such as *OMAC (Kirby 1974), Our Fighting Forces ft: the Losers* (Kirby 1974), early issues of Todd McFarlane's *Spawn* (McFarlane 1992) and Howard Chaykin's work such as *American Flagg* (1983 - 1988) and *Avengers 1959* (Chaykin 2012)), given the monthly turnaround and departmentalisation of the products, it is still a rarity in the American scene. However, in the Australian scene, it is much more common. Nevertheless, if the issues/books are not created in the anthology format[79], generally the comics here are produced in a partnership approach, with a writer and artist working together, perhaps splitting the lettering and assembly chores between them. I believe that balloon placement should be done by the artist since it is essentially part of the image, and should be considered in the composition-planning of the layouts, as Will Eisner discusses with his approach: "…On the bristol board I'll recompose a

[79] Such as *Cyclone!(*1985), *OI OI OI* comic anthology series (ComicOZ 2014), *Decay* and *Retro Sci Fi Tales* (DarkOz 2015) *Beginnings: A Comic Anthology* (Stewart et a. (ed.) 2012), and Gestalt comic's *Flinch* (2009*).*

panel and put the balloons in position, because balloons in my way of working are integral to the composition of the panel." (cited in Talon 2007, 186). As mentioned previously, poor lettering can translate to an amateurish-looking product.

As well as my writing ideas, the dialogue used in the stories arose from research. As part of the series is set in the past with characters of different culture, I had to research how the characters would speak, in an effort to give them an unique voice, much like Stan Lee's dialoguing method of Jack Kirby's comic book panels in the 1960s Marvel books. For example, the character *Leonard,* a PNG native, spoke with broken English, which I aimed to lace with pidgin english phrases and spelling, in order to get across the idea that his speech was different to the rough 1940s' Australian colloquial speech of *The Soldier*. This was also the case for the *Juggalos* in the modern story, who are a sub-culture of people with a language and jargon all of their own, which I based on the music group *Insane Clown Posse,* from which they model their dress and language. As important as referencing was for the visuals, the same can be said for the text and writing.

Though *The Soldier Legacy* is an auteur-driven project (where I undertook all levels of production), I was able to work in a collaborative format in a few different ways. This was largely by working outside of the solo series, and collaborating with another creator. For my work with writer Christopher Sequeira, I used the Marvel method on the back up features in *Dark Detective: Sherlock Holmes* issues 7, 8, the final part of the story in *The Soldier Legacy's Strange Tales 1,* and for the *Maleficus Seven* tale in the back of this issue too (see Appendix 3). These stories were all collected into *The Soldier Legacy's Strange Tales* #1, published by Black House Comics in early 2013, where I also handled the production of the book and design work. Christopher Sequeira and I discussed the plot in person and on the phone; I completed the colour illustrations (sending brief roughs where possible); Christopher then sent back rough (but page balanced/eye-leading considered) balloon placements with dialogue; and I lettered accordingly. Edits were done over the phone or via email. In fact, the majority of the process, except on those rare occasions where we attended a convention as guests together, was done via correspondence interstate. Considering the negative aspects of the Marvel method discussed in Chapter 2.2.2, we avoided collaborative issues by stating upfront our credit/involvement in the production. Notes were taken during plotting sessions, with equal input and discussion over possible elements, or how to solve problems that we were putting the characters into. Feedback was given during the

thumbnailing/roughing stage, and whatever choices in storytelling I made (based on the plots), Christopher was able to dialogue and shape the story accordingly, adding subtext and motive. I enjoyed the freedom I had to lay out a page the way I wanted and to contribute this level of input. However, it does feel like a lot of the workload on the visual-side of the production, particularly developing said layouts in the first place. Compare this with working full script, where essentially the panel is described for you, limiting the choices of camera angle, and alleviating the need to stretch a plot out.

For my layouts work for the main feature in *Dark Detective: Sherlock Holmes* #8, I worked to Christopher's full script (see Appendix 2 Fig 2.16 - 2.19), and adhered to his panel suggestions outlined not only on the page but in the diagrams of suggested layout. Generally speaking, I am pleased that the writer trusts me enough to work with a plot-driven approach; given there is no editorial interference—Christopher has worked as an editor on a number of titles and anthologies, and is a professional writer of short stories, screenplays as well as comic books—there is no need to have a physical script as such, and any changes to pacing/details are discussed before executed. For a current US-based project we are working on (that we secured during our 2013 trip to San Diego Comic-Con), we are using a hybrid script/plot-driven approach, purely because we have worked together to expand on a previous story of ours, which Sequeira intends to write up into a script with his own pacing due to the new format (digital episodes) and a US editor will oversee the work.

3.3: Working with a Writer (Script) on *The New Adventures of the Human Fly*

The New Adventures of the Human Fly #1 ("Die, Fly, Die!" written by Tony Babinski, edited by Michael Aushenker April 2013) used a similar work structure, encompassing all that the research touches on (see Appendix 4). I had to produce a short story (using pencils, inks and lettering), based on a full script for an established property (albeit obscure, but a former Marvel Comic/real-life personality from the 1970s), for a US publication (Human Fly International Inc.), on an extremely tight deadline. The aim was to apply current working knowledge on layouts (panels were suggested, but the storytelling/camera choice was up to me), character design, page design, poses, composition, then inking (as I had not inked previous *Soldier Legacy* pages, this was my first real foray into inking), and lettering. I was dealing with an editor, and before making any changes or suggestions, I consulted with the writer (scriptwriter Tony

Babinski). Again, the working process was completed long-distance; the writer was in Canada, and the editor was in Los Angeles, while I was in Australia. Unsurprisingly, emails made this process possible, and for interpretation of the script, it was necessary to have this access. As Mike Wieringo alludes to:

> ... I would never make changes without consulting the writer. When you are working with a writer, it's best to communicate and not make arbitrary decisions—it's part of the collaborative process. (cited in Talon 2007, 42)

Working with the full script on *The New Adventures of the Human Fly* #1[80], I found I had a lot of freedom in relation to the way I was able to lay out the story, despite the script dictating the action within the panels. Further still, I was able to pick the appropriate shot for the characters, scene, etc. as long as it served the story by conveying what the writer wanted it to convey. I still found it fun and interesting to draw this material. Apart from working on very rough breakdowns for *Dark Detective: Sherlock Holmes* #8 for artist Phil Cornell, I was accustomed to either writing/plotting the story myself, or working from a discussed plot using the Marvel method with Christopher Sequeira. The freedom of no scripts can allow the artist to decide on how many panels are appropriate for the page, rather than the restriction of panel numbers dictated by script. This dictates to the penciller what the possible layouts are, particularly if there are panels that emphasise an important plot point or "anchor panel" (Janson 2002, 67). However, I found there were one or two instances where I was able to suggest to the writer that I take two similar panels in the script, and merge them without affecting the pacing. It was this ability to collaborate a little on this that really helped motivation and "co-ownership" of the story, rather than be, as Mike Wieringo puts it, "…a hired hand…" for the writer (cited in Talon 2007, 41).

I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Much like the comments made by the professionals researched, I found that my suggestions for pacing adjustments on one or two pages were met with enthusiasm and trust by the writer, and he was very pleased with the outcome. The script was written in such a way that I did not feel restricted, but it was clear in outlining who appears in each panel, the details for the plot, and the dialogue, which made it easier to consider when penciling. This was much like writer Randy Stradley's suggested approach to writing scripts to artists; "…Give the artist enough information so that he or she can make intelligent decisions, but without telling them specifically how to draw it…" (cited in Talon 2007, 31). Though this was a

[80] See Appendix 4 Fig 4.01.

licensed character, and I had to follow the likeness of the main character (and the primary support characters who were based on real life people in *The Human Fly's* life), there were no real suggestions on what supporting characters should look like (apart from what was implied in time period, and nationalities). So, I was able to reference people to create suitable looks, clothing, and environment. What I particularly liked was the fact that I did not have to concern myself much with page layout or breakdowns of script because, unlike my own solo work, or working with the Marvel method, I did not have to work out what action takes place on the page and how to break that page down. It was essentially done for me. It was just a question of visualising and balancing the beats. The thought process was more a case of can I illustrate all the story elements the writer is asking of me in a clear and entertaining way? Composition and panel size choice became the primary focus in this sense, as well as camera selections, and a variety of such.

Inking was the main challenge, as the comic was to be produced in black and white; the thought process shifted from considering the way colour would play a part towards the way line weight would play a part in clarity and readability, and how to add blacks to balance the panel images/overall page and create depth through contrast. It was a big challenge, mainly due to this mindset shift, plus the more permanent line-making involved.

However, through this experience I had the confidence to incorporate inking into the next *Soldier Legacy* issue (number 6). The mindset of the inking process is slightly different again, in a sense that with the pencil, I kept shapes open (without shade) for colouring to emphasise lighting, shade and focus. Now, the inking with blacks are the definitive lighting and shade choices, with colouring being the element that will just enhance or emphasise the form/focal point.

3.4: *Soldier Legacy* Production and Format

From a product sense, the series was created with the aim to improve with each issue, and experiment based on feedback and storytelling research found. The goal was to have the product come out as regularly as possible, bearing in mind that as the sole creator, I have a day job and university commitments, other freelance work, and would therefore take longer per issue than the average comic book publisher. The mindset was

to serialise the story, following industry trends, to allow for potential growth in gaining a readership with repeat sales and for the possibility for more expansive plot elements, characterization and scenes, with an aim to assemble the issues into graphic novel trade paperback editions. Again, this is an industry trend, mainly aimed to spread across different platforms to reach new audience who prefer a book to a floppy[81] comic book.

To reach this point, it was important for me to become familiar with all aspects of comic book production—from idea to print. This included writing, pencilling, scanning, colouring, lettering, print set up (elements such as crops, bleeds and preparing pages for specifications to print), non-story page design (such as credits, editorials, and advertisments), and covers. Thankfully, I had the help of Black House Comics publisher Baden Kirgan, who operates a printing company (Jeffries Printing), and who was able to assemble the books once I forwarded him the cropped pages. Photoshop templates of generic pages and covers allowed for a more streamlined process once the completed pages are ready for print. Making multiple scanned copies and high-resolution scans made it easier when converting pages to print for books, making larger sizes for poster-style prints (particularly when a convention requests artwork for printing banners for guests; these are usually A1 sized, whereas the comic pages are closer to A4), and for remastering purposes, such as when I touched up, brightened and fixed colours/lettering typographical errors for the trade paperback version of issues 1 to 3. The more methodical I was able to be with each page (having each page saved at multiple steps of the production process), the more flexible I was in production. This helped at least keep a level of consistency when the comics were assembled into the first volume trade paperback, and are eventually assembled into one large volume in the near future once the story arc is complete.

Though serialized[82], the aim with the writing and presentation of the comics was to make it a clear three-act narrative structure, with the first issue of the Doctorate of Visual Arts (DVA) studio work (#2) being Act 1, and the following issues being Act 2 and Act 3. This idea was not so much discarded as modified as the work progressed. Typical of the modern superhero comics being produced, story arcs are four to six issues, with Act 1 being Part 1, Act 2 being Parts 2 and 3, with the beginning of Act 3 and the lead up to the climax/resolution being Part 4 (O'Neil 2001, 87). I deviated from this plan for a number of reasons: firstly, I did not consider the obvious, whereby telling

[81] The term used by the printers to denote the single-issue format: "Floppies".
[82] See Appendix 2 Fig 2.03.

a story about each main character (the World War two soldier, and his grandson in the present) would not only take up more pages, but also essentially would be telling two different stories. This hampered the original structure after the Act 1 issue. Secondly, there were organic reasons; as the project progressed—and it might have been because this was a more artistic endeavour, or simply because I had full creative control—I found I became more interested in the World War two story aesthetics and characters than I did with the modern story. I allowed more space for the World War two action to unfold, and since I was working towards convention dates as my deadlines, I have had to keep the second story more concise. I plan to complete this story arc over the course of five to six issues from issue #2, but have determined that rushing elements and hindering the natural flow of visuals, and not allowing the action the space it needs would just affect the perception of the illustration and story work negatively. Furthermore, I believe that Australian editors (and readers) do not necessarily care how long it takes for a comic book to be produced, as long as it is good. Only when the element of a real deadline for a project is introduced (such as in *The Human Fly* story) does time become more of a concern; knowing the processes well without rushing means for a better quality output when time does become a factor. But poor illustration on personal projects (such as *Soldier Legacy*) will not serve me well in this instance. It is a lesson I learned especially after striving to complete issue 4 in time for Supanova Melbourne and Gold Coast in 2012. I needed to complete production on issue 4, the trade paperback, and illustrate the backup story for *Dark Detective: Sherlock Holmes* #8 within a month of the deadline, so the publisher was able to print the books on time for the events. I felt the quality of the work suffered for no reason other than wanting to complete the books for the events, when realistically, it was a deadline I placed on myself. Though feeling it was important to have new material for the events (with the onus being it was my first time as an invited guest), in hindsight I should have taken the extra time on the illustrations that needed it. Though the *Dark Detective* work was last minute and I was already overloaded, it was still counter-productive to allow work out into the public eye, that I felt was not my best. Stan Lee, as an editor for many years with Timely/Atlas/Marvel Comics was aware of this dichotomy between producing art and producing a product:

> It isn't a question of can't our artists do better (or can't I write better)—it's more a question of how well can we do in the brief time allotted to us? Some day, in some far distant nirvana, perhaps we will have a chance to produce a strip without a frantic deadline hanging over us. (Stan Lee in a letter to a fan in 1965, cited in Howe 2012, 45)

Overall, the whole process centred on how best to tell a story, and pushing myself in learning better storytelling and drawing techniques. Further, I was concerned with how best to package the final product, and where to take it (in regards to conventions etc.). Though I find single issues sell well, as mentioned previously, the most attractive purchase seems to be the trade paperback/graphic novel model and first issues especially.[83] I was not the only person who thought this, as the publisher approached me to accelerate my initial plan to wait until the story was complete to release a *Soldier* trade paperback. This is why the first volume trade paperback was released with a "to be continued", rather than a completed story arc. It was decided firstly that not only does the audience generally prefer the book format over the regular comics (despite the regular comics helping to support the artists of the indie series in the first place), but also the "to be continued" would not matter in a sense of it being an incentive to seek the next book to see the resolution and Volume 2 is currently in production. The grapple with this new consideration is the selling of the individual issues versus the selling of the trade paperback; at the very least, I try to have the trade available at each show, and have subsequently gone through multiple print runs. Along with the fact you can offer more in the way of extra features in this format (such as concept art, sketches, and introductions), and the opportunity to fix any mistakes or print errors from the single issue print runs as it is a format that I am preferring more and more over the individual floppy comic format. It is also an easier product with which to market yourself to a reading public, retail outlets, editors, and the like.

Working out the right format, time of year, and even the locations to attempt to release and sell at, is a constant learning process. It is often dictated by the monetary constraints of the intended audience, attendees at a convention, and their ever-changing tastes, as well as, “is the book any good?” Only continual diligence in trying to improve as a creator and raising audience awareness will be effective in surviving as an illustrator and writer in the face of circumstance outside immediate control. To paraphrase Joe Simon and illustrator Alex Toth, the learning continues on all fronts of the production of comics, both in application of the research methods, and the patience within the context of the wider community. Toth notes, “Always be a student! A scholar!

[83] This is not just limited to the Australian scene; American superhero comics see the value in this too. Take for example, the DC Comics New 52. This company-wide directive removed years of story continuity and character history, recommencing their comics from issue 1. Marvel Comics had a similar, but not as drastic back story removal with the promotion *Marvel Now* and their *point 1* comic books which acted as new takes or directions on characters, restarting some of the issue counts where new writers/artists began on a particular title. These soft reboots would take the character or story in a different direction, or a different visual take on the characters included (Wheeler 2013).

Admitting to how little you know, how much there's still left to learn, is your key to learning! For a lifetime!" (Cited in Marshall 2009)

Chapter 4: Conclusion

An Australian comic book creator has to consider and acknowledge what they hope to achieve through creating comic books for an audience. This means not only the practical elements to comic book creation (such as knowing the target market, aiming to create an appealing concept and story, cover and interior art of a certain quality to gain the initial eye-catch to entice readers) but also getting the book into the public domain.

As I have outlined in this thesis, there are only a handful of ways to get the work seen by an Australian readership. This includes the Internet (through social media pages, groups and forums relating to Australian comic groups, and fan news sites); attending conventions as part of Artists Alley; or having books in sympathetic comic book stores, usually on consignment. These mainly rely on word-of-mouth to small niche audiences, friends and acquaintances. The creator must understand the limitations in this market and focus on what they are personally trying to achieve. The way I believe a creator can do this is to work on stories and projects they enjoy, and have the potential to eventually realise their successful publishing or creating goals in this context.

While this research focused on the creation, storytelling and art side of comic book making, it needed to work symbiotically with the marketing and business side of the industry. Despite my initial research focus on the development process, practice and creation of an Australian comic series, it becomes clear through my findings in Chapter 1.4 and in the listed activities in the studio work timeline (see Appendix 5) that the promotion of the work was intricately linked to the ongoing creative development of the project. I discovered that optimism and persistence were important in not only the mindset of the creator, but also in the growth of recognition and building readership at consecutive events and sale points. Being able to verbally engage with potential customers is a positive, not only in the initial purchase of the product, but also in the persistence of producing follow-up work, building recognition among the people who frequent these events, and interacting and networking with locals who will either see potential in your work and wish to stock some in their stores, or offer you screen or radio-based opportunities, such as an interview, podcast, a review online or on local TV. I have been very thankful for the opportunities I have gained so far within the national scene, such as podcasts, the Internet, public TV appearances/interviews in this regard, as well as the level of sales of the comics and graphic novel. These have all contributed to my profile here in Australia, including guest appearances at national conventions interstate, Writers Festivals, panels, talks, comic based workshops, etc. Often, word of

mouth in this regard helps when landing opportunities to further promote the work, which generally receives next to no coverage by mainstream media.

However, this, of course, is superficial on a level. It all reminds me of what Alex Toth said to Steve Rude in the end of his critique about his comic book work:

> Forget all the fandom … and kudos and hype and convention groupies' adulation—and be true to yourself and your long road ahead to the top, or to wherever you want to go — and don't let ego stop you from LEARNING to do BETTER [sic]... (cited in Marshall 2009)

It is superficial in that it does not improve the creative/art side of the process, and a personal concern is that some of the opportunities that do come about are perhaps based upon whether a person with the ability to create said exposure simply likes you, rather than the work on its own merits. This is the nature of a cottage industry such as the one in Australia. It can be hard to remain optimistic in such an environment. Whether a creator perceives the scene to be competition or not, the toiling away on large projects for months at a time can be met with little reward for effort if the readers are not as responsive as they perhaps were for a previous work. Response for a project or issue can differ from event to event, city to city. The readers are hard to engage constantly, and though I do find their encouragement, support of the work and feedback rewarding, ultimately it does not guarantee that I am learning and improving in what is essentially an art making practice, or whether the professionals who can help further my career or exposure truly find the work credible. I have been lucky in a sense that prominent editors and creators have given me a level of respect and validation regarding my work, and I have readers who genuinely enjoy the books and are consistent in their purchasing. These, I have discovered, are the motivating factors, and a strong component of the goals that I have set out to achieve as part of this research.

Through my research, I have found that it is possible for Australian comic book makers to use the methods of overseas professionals to create engaging work. Independent publisher Gestalt has proved this, with writers such as Tom Taylor. He, like other writers and artists mentioned in Chapter 1, (such as Nicola Scott and Tristan Jones) has demonstrated that they can engage a universal audience with the methods researched and explained here, such as having a focused and structured story with clear, unambiguous images. As well as talent and ability, time is important—the time one takes to reach their goal in comic book making, to refine their ability to a suitable standard, to build a body of work and an audience. Therefore, this relates to what the

end result means to the individual creator, and how high they wish to aim in their practices as an artist. I secured an independent comic book publisher here with the studio project, but like the majority of people working in comic books in this country, I am not able to live off the money derived through this work. Often, the amount of self-promotion and posting of articles, upcoming teasers of the work, *Youtube* clips from TV and podcasts not only take away from the time desired to produce the work, but also make me feel like a solo creator fighting the tide of apathy in the invisible nature of the scene, or the tall poppy syndrome of those still trying to find their feet, or voice. A goal would be to have steady projects and a profile in comics overseas as well as here, using the research and attempted skills developed, all while generating some level of income. As mentioned previously, and outlined briefly in the studio work timeline (see Appendix 5), this is only barely starting to occur on certain levels. In the eyes of the editors and writers at the professional level, it really does not matter how many podcasts, interviews, guest spots etc. one is able to achieve; provided you are speaking to the right person (someone who needs your skill set), all that matters is the quality of your work, and whether you have the ability and track record to complete the work and appeal to a readership. According to then-Marvel comics talent scout C.B Cebulski, "We [Marvel Comics] always say it's better to be published elsewhere first…" (Humphries 2009)

Madefire senior editor and former DC/WildStorm senior editor Ben Abernathy indicated in a discussion with me that even the American economy, which affects consumer spending, as well as the fluctuating audience levels of comic book readers and unknown state of the comic market, all have an effect on the projects that are given to editors, and therefore the work given to their creative teams (including other forms of entertainment affecting consumer tastes, or departments owned by the same company; what happens in a comic can affect news of the film, toy sales, and so on). When editors look for talent, it is very much a case of going with the known quantity; why take the risk of going with an unknown writer when a known writer with a proven work ethic and sales figures can do the job? As editor Mike Carlin states: "An editor should surround himself [or herself] with people whose work he [or she] likes and trusts…" (cited in Talon 2007, 24). Scott Allie states that connections and personal relationships plays an important role in success (Means-Shannon 2012).

Previously being published, and having an established amount of work seems to be more and more a common factor among Professionals in the American market, working

for the large publishers. DC Comic's *Secret Origins* panel at the 2013 San Diego Comic-Con illustrated a similar point, as top DC writers and artists discussed how they broke in to the industry. Common themes ran through all the stories, told by such professionals as Greg Capullo, Jim Lee, Gail Simone and Jimmy Palmiotti; often success is due to knowing the right person at the right time, demonstrating your improving skills, listening to feedback and practicing. It appears that in previous years, it was much easier to approach editors on the floor at these big conventions in comparison to recent years, where now, as illustrator Bernard Chang observes, "You barely see any portfolios on the con floor any more" with submissions being sent digitally, if accepted at all (Means-Shannon 2013). In fact, editors are not allowed to look at folios on the floor, and 2013 in San Diego Comic-Con in particular seemed like a closed shop in attempting to recruit talent, as from my own observations while in attendance seeing Marvel and DC not conducting folio reviews. As Greg Capullo commented, "pre-9/11" it was much easier for artists to walk into DC and Marvel offices to try and see someone about looking at their work (again, another commonality among the speakers). In my experience with Christopher Sequeira, security required a pre-arranged appointment with the editor, and we could gain access to DC Comics offices in Burbank since our names were on the list.

From speaking with editors and other artists working professionally and attending seminars (such as Ben Abernathy, Mark Waid, Nicola Scott, Colleen Doran and Chris Sequeira), I have observed that it is rather difficult for inexperienced people to gain work in the American industry at the higher levels, which is understandable (to most): why hire a person to illustrate a monthly book at Marvel with no experience in actually pencilling sequential pages? Much like creating comics themselves, there is no one direct way/formula for this to be successful. It is something that takes an undetermined amount of time to work towards and achieve. To paraphrase writer Mark Waid from *Countdown to Wednesday,* or C.B. Cebulski[84], getting into comics is like breaking out of jail: one person finds a way, and then they block it so the next guy has to find another way (Sikula 2011). I mean this in relation to securing a full-time comic book making profession. This research and studio work has shown that making a comic book is the easier part of the process; finishing them, reaching and building an audience, continuing to deliver, and having something more substantial published is the difficult part.

[84] Who was also paraphrasing Mark Waid in this comment

Ultimately though, my personal goals for comics became clear after speaking as an invited guest on a panel at the Brisbane Writers Festival in September 2013. On the panel with me was with international comic artist Eddie Campbell, writer/artist Dylan Horrocks (a New Zealand cartoonist, best known for his graphic novel *Hicksville* and writing on *Batgirl* for DC Comics) and Brisbane independent comic creator Zac Smith-Cameron. During the panel, Dylan Horrocks indicated something that I had failed to recognise in regards to my concerns and research. Though I had attempted to narrow the scope of the thesis to look at American mainstream comics specifically, Dylan Horrocks pointed out that though Marvel and DC Comics get the predominant share of the comic book media coverage and attention, there is a much larger world of comics material outside of Marvel and DC. Both Eddie Campbell and Dylan Horrocks have had creator-owned titles published via book publishers and have reached an international audience. Though they have dabbled in work for Marvel and DC respectively, their satisfaction in producing the work was low in comparison to working on projects that they had a personal connection/investment in. Their comments made me realise that, much like in their cases, or Eric Powell, Mike Mignola, or even the British comic creators in the 1980s such as Alan Moore, John Higgins, and Dave Gibbons, that quality work and refinement of one's own comics can often draw the larger publishing companies like Marvel and DC to you. However, it is not catastrophic if this is not achieved. Moreover, perhaps my illustrative style may not be suited for the tastes and style of most comic books being produced in the mainstream companies, nor do I believe it is at the level necessary to properly illustrate their stories, despite some validation of the contrary by editors overseas. It depends on the project and the target audience, it seems. There can be creative fulfillment in wanting to focus on creator-owned work, and see where it goes, in whatever capacity that may be. Thankfully, at the time of writing this, an opportunity to reach a wider audience with creator-owned work with other publishers of a national and international level seems to be emerging. This will not be under the deadline grind of the freelance lifestyle that has been noticeably attached to the mainstream publishers.

Creators have pushed for these opportunities since the creation and growth of the American direct market in the 1980s (Dallas 2013, 11-12, 278). This want continued with the mass exodus of top creators from Marvel to form Image comics in the 1990s (Howe 2012, 335-340) and growth in opportunities created by having a profile in the

superhero books[85], digital comics growth and distribution, and the advent of crowd funding giving the creators an outlet to circumvent traditional publishing models to interact directly with the audience for a project[86] (James 2013). Many editors recommend creating your own comic (for example, this is how Brian Michael Bendis was discovered by Marvel Comics) as it proves you are able to do the work and complete it, hone your storytelling ability, and create something worthwhile and unique, which ultimately satisfies you as purely and simply a writer and/or an artist. As editors Filip Sablik and Scott Allie attest to, "Go out and do it"- learn by trial and error in the process (Means-Shannon 2012). My intention to begin this research was initiated by this desire, and to discover the creative environments and the methods of the professionals, and see what I could learn and contribute to the community. I was happy to not only learn about the various general methods, but also use them all in my various projects. As stated in Chapter 3, I found the Marvel method to be the most collaborative and freeing as an illustrator, allowing to engage with a writer on plot points, and control the layouts on the page. Although, the workload felt more one-sided in this regard, and one begins to see why the disgruntled creators such as Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko were bitter as they were in the not-so-hidden histories of their work methods and dealings under their corporate employers, and collaborator Stan Lee. Working with a script was the least taxing on the thumbnailing and planning stage, as panel descriptions (and amount per page) were dictated to me as the illustrator, and not necessarily created from nothing, as a plot-driven story requires. Overall though, the storytelling approaches from plot to thumbnails to roughs and into production that the solo work allows was the most rewarding, and I felt by about issue 4-5 that I had found my method based on the discussions of various artists including Jack Kirby, Todd McFarlane, Colleen Doran, John Romita Sr.[87] and Jr.[88], Klaus Janson[89], Greg Capullo[90] and Mike Wieringo[91]. Having said that, this still puts the onus on me to challenge myself so that I do not become complacent, and that the readers in the community stay interested. This involves further experimentation in line, pose, layout and colour, all from the attempts to learn from the examples of Joe Kubert, Harvey Kurtzman, Will Eisner, Colin Wilson, Mike Royer, and (in particular to colour) John Higgins and Dean White.

[85] Thanks in part to mass audience awareness since the genre boom in Hollywood.
[86] Through crowd funding platforms themselves, or online digital sales platforms such as Comixology.
[87] See Appendix 1 Fig 1.35.
[88] See Appendix 1 Figs 1.36 – 1.38.
[89] See Appendix 1 Figs 1.43 & 1.44.
[90] See Appendix 1 Figs 1.40 – 1.42.
[91] See Appendix 1 Fig 1.39.

What the future holds for *The Soldier Legacy* after this current story arc is over is uncertain. Whether continued interest in this Australian action hero continues to grow or stagnates is unknown (much like the nature of the medium in general), or whether it was even a blip on the Australian comic scene mindset is unknown, as fickle and fractured as I discovered on my journey. But for now, I will continue to push the concept of an Australian hero, use it as a learning curve and a personal outlet of storytelling that I enjoy, and see where the work continues to take me, both physically and artistically. It is not the work I wish to ultimately define me; I wish to grow beyond it, and will probably feel more proud and satisfied with it when I have finally reached the conclusion of the last issue.

However, I am thankful for the opportunities that have arisen from researching and creating comics, and that I have been able to achieve what I set out to do from the onset of this research. That is, by adapting the methods of American comic book professionals, I created an Australian hero comic that is currently engaging a body of readers. Furthermore, *The Soldier* has led to other upcoming projects and collaborations with notable writers and publishers. The words of Jack Kirby resonate in this regard:

> Comics are a universal product. They have no boundaries. You can use them in a very serious manner or just for laughs. Comics can be used to educate, to entertain or to provoke deep thought. A well-read person will one day produce a classic epic in comics, one that everybody will remember. I wanted to do that, but I think that's going to be somebody else's job. I'm happy that I got the chance to accomplish what I did. (cited in Morrow 2004a, 44)

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