

Drawn to it

Local English teacher also authors clever comics

By day, David Hopkins is a mild-mannered English teacher at Arlington's Martin High School. At night, he dons a billowing cape and boldly colored spandex tights and rids the city streets of crime. OK, that last part was made up. But the 31-year-old does lead a double life of sorts. Outside the classroom, he's made a name for himself penning comic book and graphic novel scripts for indie publishers.

Your average, everyday costumed crime fighters do not occupy Hopkins' literary landscape. His characters are a bit more flesh and blood, endowed with a significant amount of wit and the occasional touch of pathos, from *Karma Incorporated's* motley quintet of for-hire revenge agents to the super-powered, inter-dimensional teenage hero Emily Edison.

This weekend, Hopkins will cop a squat at the Dallas Comic Con, where he'll share the spotlight with such industry luminaries as William Stout and Howard Chaykin, as well as new-school wunderkinds Kristian Donaldson and Dirk Stangely. He took some time off from grading papers and guiding plotlines to answer our questions in a recent e-mail interview.

Geoff Johnston

Q: Growing up, what were some of your favorite comic books?

Hopkins: I read mostly Marvel Comics, especially *Cloak & Dagger*, *Power Pack*, *New Mutants* and *X-Factor*. ... Anything by Louise Simonson or Bill Mantlo. I thought their stories were so wonderfully dramatic.

Q: How did you get into writing comics?

Hopkins: In 2002, my friend Aja Jones asked me to write a one-act play for her theater company. The deadline was ridiculous. I stayed up late every night for about two weeks and knocked out this story called *Space to Occupy*.

After opening night, I wanted to write more. However, theater was never my favorite medium. I went to a comic book shop, and purchased the only script book I could find. It was for a comic book series called *Powers*. I read the whole thing, then I went back and bought all the comics. I needed to get a sense for the format, and how the relationship between writer and artist worked. That was my first lesson in comic book scriptwriting.

Q: What inspires your stories?

Hopkins: Inspiration comes from lots of places. I wrote *Emily Edison* around the time my daughter was born. I wanted to produce something she could read and enjoy someday. With *Astronaut Dad*, I've always been fascinated with the astronaut mystique during the early '60s. And *Karma Incorporated* came from my love of con-artist stories.

Q: Are there common themes you find yourself exploring?

Hopkins: Regardless of genre, most of my stories deal with families in crisis. To me, that's much more interesting than one isolated protagonist with a problem.

Q: One of the cool things about your Web site [antihero.comics.com] is that people can read your scripts. Is this a way to market your

All about him ...

- Gig:** Comic book writer
- Nickname:** "Mr. H" to my students.
- Hometown:** Mansfield
- Lived here since:** After college
- Skill I wish I had:** Playing the accordion.
- Movie I've seen dozens of times:** *The Royal Tenenbaums*
- TV show I can't turn off:** *Freaks and Geeks*
- Guilty pleasure:** *Age of Empires III* on my iMac
- Song I wish I had written:** "Wave of Mutilation" by Pixies
- My last meal would be:** A cheeseburger from Lee Harvey's.



JASON JANIK/Special Contributor

writing, or is it intended to serve as a learning tool for aspiring comic book scribes?

Hopkins: I like learning about a person's creative process. I wish more comic book writers made their scripts available online. When writing a script, I ultimately hide behind the artist's talent. Some people might want to see my part in the process.

Q: Do you ever write with particular artists or artistic styles in mind?

Hopkins: Sometimes. The more I trust the artist, the less I think of them while writing. If they're really good, I assume they'll be able to illustrate whatever I throw their way. If I've worked with an artist long enough, we're pretty much psychically linked.

Q: Which classic comic book characters would you like to write for and why?

Hopkins: I could do some interesting stuff with *Fantastic Four*. Likewise, re-inventing *Cloak & Dagger* would be an incredible opportunity. In both cases, I find these characters to be fascinating, and I have a good concept for how their stories should unfold.

Q: What projects do you have in the works?

Hopkins: I have a short story appearing in *PopGun Vol. 3*. Paul Milligan and I are working on a new graphic novel called *How to Lose Big*. It's about small-press comics and failure.

Q: What's your favorite part of Dallas Comic Con?

Hopkins: It's just a fun event. I enjoy hanging out with the other comic book creators and the regular fans who come by my booth.

Dallas Comic Con

Saturday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday from noon to 4 p.m. at the Richardson Civic Center, 411 W. Arapaho Road, Richardson. \$10. dallascomiccon.com.



CHARACTER STUDY
Susan (left) and Malcolm (below) are characters in Hopkins' *Karma Incorporated*.

On Quick DFW.com

Check out Hopkins' musings on comic-book adaptations and how he'd cast his own works on the big screen. Go to blahblahlahblog.quickdfw.com.



Tom Kurzanski