

X-Press interviews Peter Murphy

Author's Note: Two attempts were required to get the material you are about to read, much to the chagrin of both interviewer and interviewee. The two interviews were radically different, and some important and entertaining material from the first interview got left out. In order to make sure you, our Constant Readers, get the whole picture, the following interview will be edited for your protection and edification. On with the show!

Act ONE

(A nervous reporter fidgets on his chair. The room is darkened. All is quiet. He seems to be waiting for something as he nervously fingers the object in his hands. A pause. Then, in a flash of blinding brilliance, accompanied by the sound of a trumpet fanfare, He appears. He is bearded, as expected, and he wears a short pony tail. He motions for the reporter to switch seats and sits down himself. Pleasantries are exchanged. Then the reporter summons his courage and presses record on his tape player.)

X-PRESS REPORTER: An interview with Peter Murphy, take two. Action! (brief pause). First of all, who are you?

PETER MURPHY: I am Peter Murphy, son of Frances P. and Vivianna. 33 years old, father of two, husband of one, illustrator. Comic book illustrator.

X.P.: Comic books? Gee, I don't know if this sounds like a non sequitur, but when did you start drawing?

P.M.: My earliest memories were of drawing. I'd fog up the windows and draw on that. Smudged the windows to hell and back. I can remember being six and drawing pirates on all the paper bags in the house, and my father going through the drawer where we kept the paper bags and saying, "Is there one goddamn paper bag in this house that doesn't have gritty-faced fellas on it?"

X.P.: Gritty-faced fellas?

P.M.: That's what he called them. Gritty-faced fellas. People with their teeth clenched. Conan, Thor, pirates going "Arrr!", that sort of thing.

X.P.: Well, from pirates you seem to have evolved a dark, grim style for yourself...

P.M.: (Jokingly) Gothic!

X.P.: (Feigning amazement) Gothic! I'm not sure... are we allowed to use that word?

P.M.: I don't know... it might be copyrighted...

X.P.: Well, call it gothic anyway. Who influenced your style? Who did you look up to?

P.M.: A Canadian, a dead man from Ontario named Gene Day. He drew a whole lot of fanzines back when fanzines were in vogue. He was working with Marvel doing "Master Of Kung-Fu" for about a two year stretch. He drew nice, dark artwork. He fell out of favour with Marvel for not drawing 'the Marvel way' and was being courted by D.C. to do Batman when he died of a heart attack at 31. He was heavily overweight and spent a lot of time drinking coffee and smoking too much. Another influence was Jim Steranko, who started out as an escape artist and master of prestidigitation. He started drawing like a Jack Kirby clone. But where he really grew was in '65-'67. He took on "Nick Fury: Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.". He took off with it. He started writing it. Back then it was unheard for an artist to write, except for Will Eisner doing "The Spirit" (brief pause while we both genuflect). But Jim Steranko brought new stuff into comics, gave them a film noir feel. His work looked a lot like a camera moving through a scene. He was a great bridge between film and movies. Another big influence was a kid from the American mid-west named Tim Truman, blues guitarist. He was a big influence.

X.P.: Now, anyone who's read Subterranean By Design (nudge nudge, wink wink) has probably seen your work there... "Blood on the Tracks", "K' Dahver P.I.", and "Pool Hall Special". Where do you get your ideas for all these varied and weird titles?

P.M.: Okay, let's see... "Blood on the Tracks" was a story done by committee, something I never want to do again. It started at one of our first meetings on the comic. One of the guys had a decent idea for a story, so I pencilled it out, thought I could hand it off for lettering, inking and so on because I was committed to inking "Planet of the Apes" at that time and was under a lot of deadline pressure. And time went by and nothing was being done about it, so I ended up pasting it up. Then another friend of mine jumped in to script it because the guy who wrote

it had moved to the mainland. So now we had a different script than we started with. So I started tightening up the pencils, adding some weird balloons, and so on. Then the guy who wrote the script came back and said "No, no, no, this is wrong," and "I can't believe what you've done with my character and story". So at the last minute I make a whole lot of changes and had him rescript it and I ink it, and letter it. Sam Carruthers, God bless 'im, came in and did the first page to take some of the pressure off. Bruce Taylor did the layout for first issue. And in the meantime I'm still on a deadline with the company in California. So I backed out. "K' Dahver, P.I." was a file story I did a few years ago just to prove I could go somewhere with my character. He was created one morning as I woke up hung-over. I said to my wife, "I feel just like Philip K. Dahver, the zombie detective." She said, who? And a little light came inside my skull. I worked on the character for about eight months before I finally wrote the story down. Other stuff, like the weird boardroom house, [was] suggested by friends. Most of the time I didn't make the first story. "Pool Hall Special" was by John MacKenzie. He told me the story but I didn't have time to do it. I wanted to, but I was working for the company in California. It was weird that a cartoonist friend of mine, Jeffrey Lawless, was in from Summerside and I handed the script to Jeff to pencil. The strange part is I enjoyed inking Jeff's stuff more than the guy's from California, because I'd watched Jeff progress from his early years at Holliston College. The story turned out well, I think. In fact, Jeff has written and drawn a story for our Christmas Special called "Path Of Thomas". It's very evocative.

X.P.: Where do your ideas come from? Do you know a little shop, or what?

P.M.: When I'm hanging with my friends going on road trips, I get oodles of ideas. It seems like every time we get together for a road trip and throw beer bottles out the car window I start seeing story possibilities. I get some ideas from dreams. And those are really spontaneous. Once I woke up with the whole story planned out in my head. It was going to be a short story, not a comic book, and the dream gave me a lot of confidence in the story. I had a ghost story idea come to me the same way. For comic book I flip through whatever I've got around to see what's moving and try to incorporate it.