

## Brandon Thomas: Fresh Blood

In 1994 writer Kurt Busiek (**Astro City**) began work on Rob Liefeld's **Youngblood: Genesis** project, a mini-series that was to tell the origin of the former Image superteam. But Busiek left the book after only completing the plot in 1995. As a result, **Genesis** has remained dormant for over eight years.

But in less than a month, the long wait will be over. Rob Liefeld has finally taken his **Youngblood: Genesis** mini-series out of the drawer and has made plans to release the book on July 18 (yes, this year) as the official launch of Arcade Comics. **Bloodsport**, another Youngblood series written by Mark Millar (**Ultimates**, **Trouble**) and drawn by Liefeld himself will also hit the street the same day.

To complete **Genesis**, Liefeld took a chance on SBC's very own Ambidexterous columnist, Brandon Thomas. Put in the running to script the book through a recommendation from Mark Millar, Thomas worked hard to beat out some established creators who wanted to take a shot at **Youngblood**.

This will be Thomas' first published comics work.



**SBC:** So how did you get the gig, and what role did Mark Millar play to set things in motion?

**Brandon Thomas:** Back in November, Rob agreed to an interview for Ambi. and a couple weeks later, after reading something in my column, he approached me about working on a few projects. I guess it wasn't the right time because for five months we'd trade a few e-mails back and forth, but nothing quite solidified. Last week, he e-mailed and basically said it was time for us to stop dancing and just do the damn thing, which was finishing off **Youngblood Genesis**, with the first issue due very soon. He faxed me all of the material I'd need, meaning Kurt Busiek's original detailed plot, and the finished pencils by the Walker Bros., and I went to work. Thirty pages fully scripted in a few days, revising and tweaking the whole thing along the way until I was nearly "satisfied" with it. Rob called the next day and told me how much he dug it, probably not knowing that I'd just finished hours before.

Mark Millar, a great talent who's proven to be much too kind, likely offered some strong words of encouragement as Rob turned down other writers, one of which willing to work for absolutely nothing, that prompted Liefeld to take a chance on me. I don't know what Millar saw in me that prompted his flattering support, but he's had my back, and that's something I won't forget. I hope that I can live up to the faith he has in me.

**SBC:** As you mentioned, you are finishing **Youngblood: Genesis** based on Kurt Busiek's plot and not writing it from scratch. Can you better explain exactly what your role has been on the book? Is it difficult working from another writer's notes?

**BT:** I'm laying down final script using Kurt's original plot as a guide to keep things straight. The pace and flow have already been established, but I'm responsible for all narrative and dialogue. Kurt will have written a few paragraphs that describe every page, dropping important bits along the way, and possibly even including a



bit of dialogue, I'll match it with the Walker Bros. resultant artwork and write final text.

I haven't found it difficult at all, because while I think I'm approaching the material from a different angle than Kurt, the intent of his story isn't being lost. He's a great writer and the fact is that his story still holds up and does it easily. I was concerned that it may appear outdated in comparison, but the fears were unfounded. Kurt provided the primer and I'm laying the final coat of paint on the origin of **Youngblood**.

**SBC:** Were you a fan of the characters before taking on the project? What sort of research was necessary?

**BT:** I discovered the comic industry at the exact same time that Image Comics came onto the scene, and the possibility of attaching myself to characters and series' right off the bat was something I naturally gravitated to. So yeah, I was all about Image, and one of my first comics was **Spawn #1**, upon a recommendation from my father that was aggravated by my stack of **Spidey** and **X-Men** comics. From there I discovered **Youngblood**, **Cyberforce**, **Savage Dragon**, **Shadowhawk**, **Wetworks**, **Wildcats**, and so on.

So I'm very familiar with the characters, and one of the first pitches that ever went to a company was handed to Liefeld when his Awesome Entertainment company was in full swing.

Any particular character bits that I was unclear about, I ran past him.



**SBC:** So, how closely have you worked with Rob Liefeld on this project?

**BT:** He basically provides me the material (plot and penciled pages) and then sends me off with little interference. We've been in daily contact either through e-mails, phone calls, or faxes. Anytime I have questions about something, we trade notes but otherwise he's been relatively hands-off. For some reason, he appears to be trusting me with this.

**SBC:** You turned around the script in record time. Fans have been waiting for this book a long time, so what was the urgency? What accounts for your speed?

**BT:** Convention season. **Youngblood: Genesis** will launch right alongside Millar's **Bloodsport** as its companion piece. The first **Youngblood** story and the last are going to serve as Arcade Comics' official inauguration.

Regarding my speed, I probably won't blame it on anything but the column. After doing it for almost two years, it would be nearly impossible for me to have not developed even a small bit of

discipline when it comes to writing.

**SBC:** You mentioned that the Walker Bros. are handling the art chores on **Youngblood: Genesis**. What do you think of their work so far? Will things 'splode'?

**BT:** The duo of Chad and Eric Walker have completed the art chores, and I know everyone says this, but their work increases in quality with every issue. Issue two raises the bar even higher and I see no reason why this trend won't continue until the very end of the series.

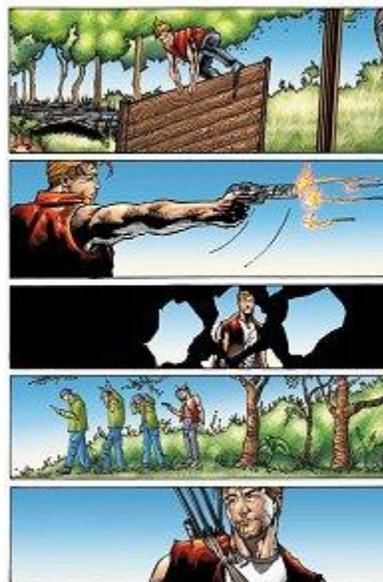
And yes, things do explode. The event that kickstarts the series is an alien ship crashing to Earth,

completely altering the status quo of human existence. Things become exponentially louder from then on in.

**SBC:** Do you feel that you have something to offer this project that neither Busiek nor Millar could've brought to the story?

**BT:** I'm not even walking into that one ;) What I think will be obvious about this project in particular is the absolute, unending, obsessive hunger in my scripting. For years, I've dreamed, I've imagined what my first writing gig would encompass, and this has been an absolute blast to work on thus far. If you told a wide-eyed teenager with that first Image comic in his hand, that one of the creators you followed way back when would offer you your first gig ten years down the road, and then step completely back and let you run with it, I would've laughed in your face. Having this book in a matter of weeks is another situation that just blows me away. I think people are going to dig the one-two that **Genesis** and **Bloodsport** are prepared to bring. It's my hunger and Millar's experience that will hopefully make for two of the most unexpected books out this summer.

**SBC:** One thing that's been a defining presence in your online persona and writing to date is your race/ethnicity. Will this come into play with your work on this series? If so, how? If not, why?



**BT:** Man, I knew this one was coming. One reason why I nearly accepted this job without question came down to the fact that Liefeld wasn't e-mailing with "a black book" (which is something that doesn't really exist in nature) for me to script. Whenever someone new steps up to the plate, it's only natural to qualify their approach and their style into an easily referenced category, and I'm very serious about not becoming a writer who's exclusively the go-to guy for writing characters with additional melanin.



The project I was taking a break from when Rob mailed features several minority characters in the main cast, and while it's definitely important that some of my work serves as a jackhammer to the rampant stereotypes that minorities sometimes appear grafted to in several areas of entertainment, not just comics, there are more stories to be told, and I intend to do the telling on several levels, not just the darker ones.

Sidney Poitier told a young Denzel Washington that an actor is judged by his first five roles, and I think a similar thread exists in the comics industry. I want my first few projects to be almost completely different from each other so I'll be forced to stretch myself in different directions and showcase a bit of flexibility. So part of the reason I told Rob I'd do this is because **Youngblood** is

full of white people. I refuse to become the exclusively "black writer" though there's really no such thing. I'm just a writer who happens to be black.

**SBC:** Will these books come out on time as promised by the publisher?

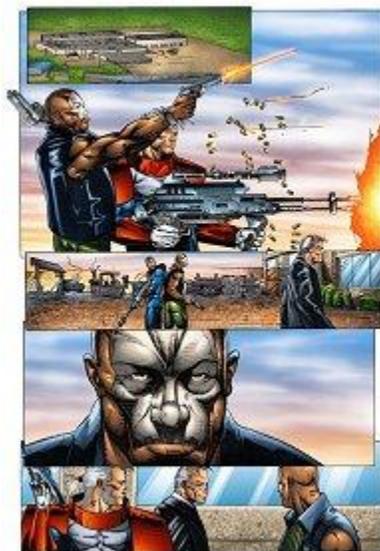
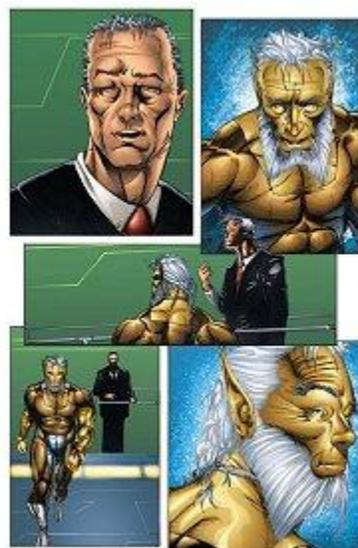
**BT:** I think Rob is very serious about these books releasing together and building an appropriate

summer buzz. **Youngblood Genesis** is the wild card no one is expecting and I think the two books will work well together...assuming I'm not bringing the bar down too much. [smiles]

I believe they're going to hit in time for the big party at SDCC. I may even be there signing books, if anyone's interested. And Millar and I will both be at Wizard World Chicago. So who knows, but I'm betting they'll drop as scheduled.

**SBC:** Rob is viewed as the bad boy of comics. He's had to deal with a lot of negativity over the years. In my opinion, a lot of the flack he's taken is often ridiculous, but it seems like he can never live down his mistakes from the early 90s. How have you gotten along with him? Did you ever have any concerns about working for a guy with such a notorious reputation?

**BT:** I'd heard the stories, same as everyone else, and of course I considered that when we first started trading e-mails about potential work, but I asked Millar and a couple other pros I'm in contact with and they said go for it and put everything you've got into it. Even if the work was unpaid (which it isn't), I challenge someone to name five popular writers that didn't get their start at a smaller independent publisher. I don't view this situation any differently and can only base my opinion on my personal experience with Rob and thus far he's been nothing but encouraging, respectful, and straight-up. Rob's never taken anything from me, so we don't have any problems.



Breaking it down even further, you need to check the record, he's worked and was partnered with Jeph Loeb (Eisner-award winner and best selling writer) and with Alan Moore (one of the greatest writers to ever touch the artform). Not to mention Mark Millar. Every relationship he's ever had with a creator hasn't ended in fire and brimstone, and if you find an aspiring writer out there that would reflexively turn down PAYING professional work that would allow you to garner some experience and provide some respectable calling cards because the offer came from Rob Liefeld, they're frontin'.

**SBC:** How has working on **Youngblood** helped you as a new writer? What will you take away from this experience and apply to future writing gigs?

**BT:** Speed without sacrificing quality is probably one thing because the first issue needed to be done very quickly, and the most important thing for me is become better with every issue. One of the cool things about having a weekly column is going back to the beginning and looking how things have improved as I've matured as a writer. Viewing older work is sometimes frightening but it's also exciting because I've graduated from one set of mistakes to another, and hopefully that continues.

There's always that feeling in the back of my head before I begin that warns me the result may be absolute garbage, but the reason I'm afraid of a script now and the reason I'm afraid of it six months down the line should be different or I'm not learning anything.

And for real, it'll probably make for some interesting columns. [laughs]

**SBC:** It's well documented that you have other cards in play in the cruel poker game that's the comics industry. Is there any chance you'll blow your wad on this hand, and not be invited back to the table?

**BT:** I suppose it's always a possibility that I'll be branded with a scarlet letter "L" and denied work from other publishers, but this was an opportunity that I'd have been foolish to pass up, and I think the work itself will ultimately be more important than any possible negativity that may be directed at Rob. My dream is to write professionally and Liefeld gave me a chance to do that and thus far we've both been really happy with the results. We talked about the likely event that some might frown on this or at the very least raise the suspicious eyebrow, but Rob promised me I'd enjoy the work and experience, and be treated respectfully, and so far so good.

And I have a very large wad actually... more than enough to go around I think. [laughs]



**SBC:** This is it, B. Your first written comic will soon be published. How does it feel to finally lose your virginity?

**BT:** Exciting and terrifying at the same time. You can exhale and tell yourself that you've conquered an important hurdle, but the more you replay the experience in your mind, the more things you can remember doing wrong. As with anything, practice makes perfect, and with a few things under my belt, maybe I'll become a lot more confident about whipping it out for you. [laughs]