

Farel Dalrymple: On A Dark Horse He Rides

"Farel Dalrymple is one of the finest young draftsmen to quietly sidle into comics in a long time. And one of the field's most gifted storytellers."

-- Walter Simonson

You probably don't know who Farel Dalrymple is, and you've probably never heard of his thought-provoking, urban fantasy series, **Pop Gun War** either - but you soon will. In June, Dalrymple's little **War** will be popping up on mainstream radar courtesy of Dark Horse Comics, where the talented creator will be publishing the trade paperback collection of the first five issues in his "daring and beautiful" series.

Dalrymple, a [Xeric Grant recipient](#), Society of Illustrators Gold medal winner and Russ Manning Award nominee, created his first self-published comic book, **Smith's Adventures in the Supermundane**, in 1999. Currently, he serves as an editor and contributor for the New York-based anthology series [Meathaus](#), which will soon release its seventh collection, along with writing and illustrating **Pop Gun War**.

Dalrymple recently took the time to talk with me about his Pop Gun War, the deal with Dark Horse, and why parties are more memorable with Evil Knievel action figures.

MARKISAN NASO: The first 5 issues of **Pop Gun War** will be collected in June, but not by your current publisher, Absence of Ink. How did you hook up with Dark Horse and why did you choose to publish the first trade with them?

FAREL DALRYMPLE: My first work with Dark Horse was an 8 page story I did in last year's **Dark Horse Maverick Annual** [Happy Endings](#). One of the best editors in comics, Diana Schutz called me up one day, told me she liked **Pop Gun War**, and asked me if I wanted to be in the **Maverick Annual** she was putting together. After my work for that was finished I asked her if Dark Horse would be interested in publishing the **Pop Gun War** collection. I've always liked the quality of work Dark Horse puts out. I love working with Absence of Ink but I felt that Dark Horse would be able to handle the distribution better with a trade paperback. Obviously being one of the bigger comic book companies they just have more resources at their disposal for promotion and distribution.

NASO: Will Dark Horse be the new publisher for future **Pop Gun War** issues, or are you only committed to them for the trade?



DALRYMPLE: Right now I am only committed for the trade. I plan on keeping the individual issues of **Pop Gun War** with A.O.I. I like the freedom I have publishing with them. We have a good relationship and hopefully **Pop Gun War** and A.O.I. can keep growing together. I'd love to keep doing stuff for Dark Horse too though. If they decide to keep publishing the **Pop Gun War** collections that would be all right with me. Also, I would be excited to work on anything else for Diana. Eventually, I'd like to pitch a separate mini-series idea or something along those lines and see if they want to do it.

NASO: How would you describe the first five issues of **Pop Gun War** to readers who might not be familiar with the story?

DALRYMPLE: It's always hard for me to describe. It's no wonder so many people tell me they don't really know what's going on after reading it. **Pop Gun War** is centered on Sinclair and the strange city he lives in. After taking a discarded pair of magical wings Sinclair discovers he can

fly. From there the story is mostly about him interacting with all these other bizarre characters in the city. This homeless guy Addison is his best friend, maybe his only real friend. They help each other out a lot. The Rich Kid, This supernatural mischief-maker, constantly torments Addison. Sinclair's sister, who is not much older than he is, is in a rock band and doesn't come home too much. There are some other characters who shake things up: Koole, the crazy monk; the mysterious Mr. Grimshaw; Sunshine Montana, the dwarf who becomes a giant. In the last issue we are introduced to King Doll. Then there is that floating fish, Percy, who has some weird purpose that I haven't revealed yet.

NASO: How did you come up with the idea for **Pop Gun War**? Why did you decide to center the story around Sinclair, a young boy?

DALRYMPLE: **Pop Gun War** was something that evolved out of an idea I had in my sketchbook. I had this short story idea for an angel that falls from the sky and pays someone to cut off his wings. Later I decided I wanted to do a comic series set in an urban environment. The way I write comics is taken from different ideas I have jotted down in my sketchbook. So I sort of integrated some sketches and ideas and **Pop Gun War** was born. Most of my stories are in some way about children. I'm not sure why. Maybe my childhood is just the place in my head I pull stuff from. I'm really attracted to children's books and movies, or stories where children play a big part in them like **City of the Lost Children** or **The Brother's Karamozov**.

NASO: You've mentioned some of the interesting supporting characters in **Pop Gun War** -- Sinclair's rock star sister Emily, Addison the homeless guy, the invisible Rich Kid, Percy the mute fish -- Are these characters based on people you know or on encounters you've had, or did they just spring from your imagination?

DALRYMPLE: I guess most of them have just come out of my own head, but I'm sure they were initially inspired by something. The one I am most conscious of is Koole. That one came directly out of reading **The Brothers Karamozov**. Some of the other characters look like people I know. Addison, The Rich Kid, and Koole's likenesses were based on people I know but their personalities weren't really.

NASO: Any chance of seeing a spin-off book starring one of the supporting characters in **Pop Gun War**?

DALRYMPLE: Not really. Issue #6 is going to be pretty much just Emily. I might take turns featuring just one character in an issue. I don't really see having a separate ongoing or mini series featuring Percy and Sunshine. But who knows? I can pretty much do whatever I want with **Pop Gun War** so if I wanted to do a series about one or two of the characters I would just feature them for a while in **Pop Gun War**. Though I like their work I don't think that I could do what Brian Wood or Mike Mignola do and have other people draw my characters in miniseries or one shots. I don't think there is anything wrong with that. It would be just too weird for me to have other people drawing my characters. I don't know if the demand would ever be there for something like that anyway. Of course you never know. I might eat all these words in years to come.



NASO: **Pop Gun War** seems to touch on various themes of childhood, alienation, religion and urban hardship. Are these ideas intended?

DALRYMPLE: Yeah, mostly. I mentioned before how much my own childhood seems to influence my work. I am fascinated by how unfair and cruel little things would seem to a sensitive lad like myself. I spent a lot of my growing up alone and I'm sure that affected my writing. Living in New York City is a big part of **Pop Gun War**. Although the city in the comic isn't New York I take a lot of the things that happen to me here and put them in my work. The religion theme is something that wasn't really intended but I would have to be a moron to not recognize that it's there in my work. I grew up very religious. I spent most of my adolescence in Tulsa, Oklahoma, going to church every Sunday and Wednesday. Even though I am not very religious these days I'm sure that it comes out in my comics.

After having 20 some years of religion forced on me it would be hard not to have that influence me.

NASO: What are some of the things you have planned for **Pop Gun War** after issue 5?



DALRYMPLE: I usually don't plan much further than the next issue. Issue six is going to be around 40 pages and will pretty much feature just Emily. Her band is going to be stuck in a small town. She follows these weird guys down a hole and discovers a secret underground world, sort of my Alice in Wonderland. Issue 7 will probably have us hanging out with Sinclair and Addison in the city again. I had this idea for them meeting an astronaut but I haven't really fleshed it out yet. Koole and King Doll should make another appearance soon. I did a three-page prologue for the trade featuring Koole and Percy. Doing that short piece made me want to play with those characters some more.

NASO: Do you plan to tell the tale of **Pop Gun War** in a set number of issues, or do you see the story as open-ended?

DALRYMPLE: Definitely open-ended. I have so much freedom with a book like **Pop Gun War** I don't see it ever ending. Unless I just get sick of doing it one day. I might be something I take a break from every now and then but I think I will probably always go back to it.

NASO: What does **Pop Gun War** offer new readers that they can't get elsewhere?

DALRYMPLE: I don't know. It's hard for me to say because I am a little too close to it. I'm really surprised sometimes at certain cartoonists and artists some people compare my work to. When I decided to make **Pop Gun War** it was partly out of frustration on what was available in the comic market. My desire was to make something that I would want to pick up and read if I was in a comic shop. It's a weird adventure/fantasy book that isn't influenced much by adventure/fantasy books. My book seems to me to ride the fence between two schools of independent comics. There are the more cartoony small press books and then there are the more realistic drama/action/adventure comics that seem to be trying to do the type of thing that Marvel, DC and Image mostly put out. I don't mean to generalize or say that stuff isn't any good. I know there are exceptions to this as well many good comic books in both camps.

I don't think I am revolutionizing the comic industry or anything. I just feel that a lot people that are familiar with comics already don't know what to make of **Pop Gun War**. A reader that is just into James Kochalka type stuff might be put off right away by my drawings. Whereas a dude that just reads DC comics might look at my book then get annoyed that the story doesn't make any sense to him. It seems like there is a certain type of comic reader that is attracted to **Pop Gun War**. Occasionally I get someone at a convention that says to me, "Yes, this is exactly what I have been looking for" or something to that effect. I think if I am going to attract more readers it will probably have to be outside of the regular comic reading audience. I find it interesting that almost half of the letters and emails I get from readers are from overseas. Maybe people in other countries just write more. Also, not that I get tons of fan mail, but a lot the letters I get are from girls. Which I think is pretty cool considering most of the comic audience out there is male. Geez, I hope I am not alienating my audience with all of this talk.



NASO: Don't worry. You're cool. Aside from **Pop Gun War**, you've also started to dip your toes in some mainstream publisher work, such as **Grendel: Red, White and Black** for Dark Horse. What was your experience like working with Matt Wagner?

DALRYMPLE: Very good. Matt is great. At first it was a little strange for me to work with a writer. I'm

so used to writing my own stuff that I had to get into a different mindset when I started it. **Grendel** was fun to work on because of how many people I knew that loved the character. A lot of my friends grew up reading Matt Wagner's stuff. Matt was pretty loose about the way I drew it as far as camera angles and panel layout go. Which was cool because there was a lot more information on each page then there is on a typical page of **Pop Gun War**. It was an interesting challenge for me. The story was fun to draw but a little creepy too. Pedophilia and child porn are subjects that I would probably never have approached in **Pop Gun War**. Speaking of different, lettering the pages with the "F" word on it was a trip. I happen to swear like a sailor but my comics have always been pretty G rated.

NASO: Are you interested in working on more established characters at large companies (such as Marvel or DC) in the future? If so, which characters would you like to take a crack at?



DALRYMPLE: **Spider-Man** and **Daredevil**! Those were my favorite comics when I was younger. I grew up reading mostly Marvel comics, so those are all the characters I am familiar with. Of course there is always **Batman**. What comic artist doesn't want to have a crack at **Batman**? And ever since I read the first **Books of Magic** series I have wanted to do something with Tim Hunter.



NASO: What other projects are you working on right now? If there are any top secret ones, feel free to tell me about them immediately.

DALRYMPLE: I just finished putting my trade together and wrote **Pop Gun War #6**. I have a couple of things coming up that I am supposed to be doing for DC. But I haven't signed any contracts yet, so I probably shouldn't say anything more than that. Sorry.



NASO: You are probably asked this all of the time (just like me), but out of curiosity, where does your name come from?

DALRYMPLE: My first or last? My last name is Scottish. The story behind my first name is not as cool as you might think. I used to ask my Mom about it and she would always say that my Dad named me. I couldn't ask him because my parents were divorced. I didn't see my father that often, never saw him actually. I finally asked him a few years ago. I was expecting it to have some sort of interesting story attached to it like him finding the name in this obscure book or something. It was kind of a letdown to find out he named me after an ice cream parlor in California. I guess he just liked the name. At least he changed the spelling. Oddly enough I remember having a birthday party there when I was 5. I even remember getting an **Evil Knievel** action figure at the party.

NASO: Do you still have that action figure?

DALRYMPLE: Sadly, no. I don't really have anything left from my childhood but I remember the toy very well.

NASO: Thanks, Farel.

For those interested in picking up a copy of the **Pop Gun War TPB** visit www.darkhorse.com for more information. Below is the press release for the book.

To find out more about Farel Dalrymple visit his website at popgunwar.com

Markisan Naso worked for the National Safety Council for nearly three years writing articles on "Elevator Etiquette", and accumulating an impressive collection of ear plugs and rape whistles until he responded to an SBC help wanted ad at [Millarworld](http://Millarworld.com). Now he works part-time writing news items and

begging talented creators to talk with him. Markisan currently serves as SBC's resident News Editor. His quick rise to power has not yet gone to his head.