

## Jeff Mariotte: Cursed

This June writer Jeff Mariotte continues Joss Whedon's TV series, **Angel**, in a five-issue comic book story called **The Curse**. Published by **IDW**, **The Curse** picks up some time after the show's fifth season finale. Mariotte is well versed in Angel lore, having written eight novels based on the series, as well as a behind-the-scenes book, "Angel: The Casefiles."

The first of many **Angel** comics planned at IDW, **The Curse** follows Angel as he searches for the band of gypsies that cursed him with a soul. I talked to Jeff about resurrecting a cult-favorite TV series as a comic book, the pressure of pleasing Angel fans and whether or not Joss Whedon left any season six notes lying around.

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**MARKISAN NASO:** Even though the "Angel" TV series ended in mid-2004 many people are still fascinated by the character and his world. What do you think draws people to the mythology of Angel? What about the concept appeals to you?

**JEFF MARIOTTE:** Vampires are always intriguing characters — the idea that they need to draw the life from others in order to survive, and the incredible intimacy of how they do it, has kept them popular for ages. Add in the twist that Angel is a vampire with a soul, a conscience, a memory of all the horrible things he did and the capacity to understand that they're horrible, and you have a character who is dark and conflicted and utterly compelling. He is trying to redeem himself, seeking forgiveness for his sins, which I think we can all identify with. And he has the strength and courage to do so on a bigger level than most of us, which adds to the appeal.

I've loved writing Angel from my first Angel novel, "Close to the Ground," for just these reasons. I also liked the private detective aspect in the early days, and the kind of superhero action that he can get involved in. Combining horror and other genres is very interesting to me — hence my Western/horror series **Desperadoes**. So throwing together the horrific and the mystery/superhero aspects of Angel is a lot of fun.

**NASO:** How has your experience of working on Angel novels and the first Angel companion book prepared you to work on the comic book series?

**MARIOTTE:** Because I watched every episode of "Angel" closely — the first two seasons, multiple times, to do the nonfiction "Angel: The Casefiles," — and interviewed virtually every member of cast and crew, I have a very thorough grounding in Angel's world. Other people can do the research, but I, with my co-authors, literally wrote the book. On top of that, I've written more Angel novels than any other writer. So I'm very familiar with the characters and settings and concepts that Joss Whedon and David Greenwalt came up with. Also, the fact that I've written so many of the novels helps Fox and Mutant Enemy have a certain comfort level with me being the writer chosen to carry on the storyline. They know I have the utmost respect for their creations, and that I can achieve the mood, the cross between humor and horror, that they did with the TV show.

**NASO:** Is there any difference in the way you approach an Angel novel and an Angel comic book?

**MARIOTTE:** I always approach a novel and a comic book differently in terms of the amount of work

and the type of writing I'll be doing. But in many ways, this project is much like a novel. I'm doing research on the Romanian aspects of the story, and of course re-watching pertinent Angel episodes and reading the handy reference books to prepare for each issue. The main difference is probably that I try to plow through a novel — at least its first draft — from start to finish, whereas with a comic book miniseries I can work on an issue at a time and stagger it between other projects.

**NASO:** Television and movie properties don't always translate well to comic book form. Why do you think the Angel concept makes for good comics?

**MARIOTTE:** Angel is, at his core, a superhero. He has powers beyond those of mortals. He is driven to do good. He has a group of interesting supporting characters. The same aspects that might draw a reader to Batman or Superman or Spider-Man are present in Angel, except for the colorful spandex. And to be honest, the lack of spandex is probably a good thing, at least as far as I'm concerned. I'm comfortable with the leather duster.

**NASO:** **The Curse** follows Angel as he searches for the gypsy clan that cursed him with a soul. For people who may not have watched "Angel," can you give some background on what happened?

**MARIOTTE:** During his evil vampire days, Angel was given a gift by Darla, the vampire who "made" him — a beautiful Gypsy girl. Angel promptly killed her, of course, since that's what he did in those days. But he was caught, in this instance, by her family. They cursed him, restoring his soul to him so that he would feel the crushing weight of all of his crimes. Now he was still immortal, still a vampire, but one who lived in incredible agony because he also had a conscience. He could no longer bring himself to feed on innocents, but instead drank the blood of vermin, or criminals and evil people.

Eventually, he turned around completely and started working to redeem himself for his crimes. But the kicker to the curse was that if he ever managed to find "perfect happiness," he would lose his soul and become pure evil again. So if he was able to become good enough to draw someone into his life with whom he could truly be happy, then he would be changed in such a way that his love would fear him instead of loving him. Pretty much of a drag for the poor guy.

**NASO:** The IDW press release hints that Angel is trying to reverse his curse. Can you talk about why he might want to give up his soul?

**MARIOTTE:** Reversing his curse was not exactly the right choice of words. He's fine with a soul — he just doesn't want the "perfect happiness" clause that's attached to it. Look at it from his point of view — he's given of himself time and again, saved the world from one apocalypse after another. Is it so bad to ask a simple favor for himself?

**NASO:** When Angel first started as a TV show it was a street-level adventure, but over the years it grew into an epic with world-shattering consequences. What scale will **The Curse** be on and why?

**MARIOTTE:** **The Curse** takes Angel back to a more subdued, personal scale. You can do epic storylines in comics, obviously, and we'll certainly do some down the line. But we wanted to get back to Angel's roots — kind of peel away some of the extraneous stuff and take a new look at who he is and what he's about.

**NASO:** The final episode of Angel gave fans a great send-off, but it was also very open-ended. Will **The Curse** shed any light on what happened immediately after the final scene in the TV show?

**MARIOTTE:** We don't take off from the last moment of the show, but throughout the course of this miniseries and the next we'll learn what

happened. Basically, cutting away where he did was the best thing Joss could have done. It would have been a huge fight scene, but on the other hand it would have been one more fight scene in a show that had plenty of big fights. I don't think we need to see that particular fight — what's more interesting is who survived, and we'll reveal that.

But not right away...

**NASO:** What kind of input has "Angel" creator Joss Whedon had on **The Curse**?

**MARIOTTE:** This is a trickier question than it appears, because in the world of licensing there is a difference between "approval" and "input," and I'm not sure what the legal relationship between Fox and Mutant Enemy is. My impression is that Fox is doing everything in its power to make sure Joss is happy with what we do, and I know that Joss is looking at everything and making comments or thumbs-up, thumbs-down on stuff. Like Fox, we want Joss to be satisfied with these [comics] and to be glad that IDW ended up with the license.

**NASO:** So there isn't some Joss Whedon outline you're working from then; no secret notes for Angel Season Six lying around?

**MARIOTTE:** No secret notes. I wish there were. Instead, what we were told was to make it up, and if it's wrong they'll tell us.

**NASO:** **The Curse** will focus heavily on Angel and not so much on the supporting characters from the TV show. Why the decision to keep his allies on the sidelines?

**MARIOTTE:** Largely this goes back to the earlier question about the scale of the series. The name of the book is **Angel**, and he's the star. We really want it to be his story. We'll see the others in some fashion in this miniseries, but we won't really spend time with them until the second miniseries.

**NASO:** I don't know if you take requests, but I'd really like to see what happened to that electric-girl, Gwen. She just kind of disappeared on the TV show. What do you say?

**MARIOTTE:** You never know, do you?

**NASO:** Ah, you've given me hope, Jeff.

There's been some talk that the WB will produce "Angel" movies for television. If these films are made how will they impact the comic book series?

**MARIOTTE:** The rule in licensed fiction is that what's on the screen is canon, and the rest is not. I've done a lot of original licensed fiction — "Buffy," "Angel," "Charmed," "Star Trek," "Andromeda," and more — and am used to that rule, and fine with it. Sometimes stuff shows up on screen that contradicts what you wrote, and sometimes the timing is such that a book comes out after the episode that contradicts it airs, causing fans who don't understand the schedule of publishing to think you don't actually watch the show. That bothers me, because I watch every show I write in, but I've also been on the other side of the fence, doing the licensing. I know how it all works and I have agreed to live with those rules.

So if the movies get made, great — then I get to see how Joss would have continued the story, and maybe they'll help the comics sell better. If not, then what I've done, non-canonical as it may be, will be the closest thing there is to canon, and that's cool too.

**NASO:** What's it like to continue such a beloved cult-favorite series? Do you feel any pressure to deliver the kinds of stories Angel fans want?

**MARIOTTE:** Absolutely. Fortunately, I have a lot of experience doing that, and Angel fans who've read the novels have already spoken loud and clear. I'm not the most prolific Angel novelist just because I write fast or schmooze the editors best, but because the fans like the stories I tell and the way I capture the voices and personalities of the characters they love.

That said, it's an incredible honor to be the writer asked to continue the series from its end, at a time when no other writer is doing so. I'm touched and gratified, and hope to deliver the best **Angel** comics possible.

**NASO:** Italian illustrator **David Messina** isn't a familiar name to most American comics fans. Why was he chosen for this project and what does he bring to it artistically?

**MARIOTTE:** David was chosen by Chris Ryall at IDW, and I'm not sure where Chris found him. But he's a very talented artist with a great grasp of the characters, and he can get their likenesses and personalities down on the page with a few economical lines. I'm looking forward to seeing what he does with the scripts. And of course to seeing the work of the great cover artists Chris has lined up, like my old friends **Igor Kordey** and **Tim Bradstreet**.

**NASO:** **The Curse** is only the first of many **Angel** miniseries planned by IDW. You even mentioned a second mini earlier. Will you be writing all the **Angel** comics or will these series feature different writers? Will there be other illustrators?

**MARIOTTE:** The plan is that I will be writing more minis, and maybe one-shots as well, and that David will be joined by other illustrators. We may also add in other writers, but they'll work closely with me so that the overall "future Angel" framework we come up with will be consistent.

**NASO:** Can comic readers who aren't familiar with Angel read **The Curse** without knowing all the background from the show?

**MARIOTTE:** Definitely. Without spending lots of time as Exposition Man, the back-story will be filled in early on. A reader who picks up the first issue will know who Angel is and what he's all about by the end of that issue.

**NASO:** There will likely be some Angel fans who are disappointed that Joss isn't writing **The Curse** himself. What can they expect from your story?

**MARIOTTE:** That's definitely true. On the other hand, there is probably no other writer who's written as many words about Angel as I have. More stories, more scripts, but when you go by word count I'm certainly the most prolific Angel writer. So short of getting Joss or David Greenwalt or one of the writers like David Fury who was with the show all along to do it, I seem to be the next best thing. And those guys are not only busy, but expensive. Maybe down the line we can entice some of them to do some scripts, since I know some of them are interested in comics, and have some experience.

As for what fans can expect from **The Curse** — they should expect a fast-paced, compelling story that springs from Angel's past but takes him in new directions. They should expect some genuinely frightening and creepy moments, leavened by humor. And they should understand that I know the character very well and will do everything in my power to treat him with the respect that he deserves, and will remain absolutely true to the great character that Joss and David (and David Boreanaz) developed.

**NASO:** Aside from **Angel: The Curse**, what other projects are you working on, Jeff?

**MARIOTTE:** **Desperadoes**, of course, is in the middle of a five-issue miniseries, on which Jeremy Haun is doing absolutely stunning artwork. And I think it's the scariest **Desperadoes** story yet, so I'd

love to see people check that out. Book-wise, my novelization of the movie "Boogeyman" just came out. Next up after that is the fourth in my original teen horror series "Witch Season" and an Andromeda novel, "The Attitude of Silence." Later in the year the first in a Hyborian Adventures trilogy, set in the world of Conan but without using him as a main character. So plenty of stuff to read out there. The website for more info. on all of this is [www.jeffmariotte.com](http://www.jeffmariotte.com).