

TOP COP
By
Paul Di Filippo

When I started angling for my first major comic-book scripting assignment, I never at the apex of my most grandiose wish-fulfillment fantasies imagined that I would be hired to extend one of the many fictional universes created by Alan Moore. And not just any of his numerous creations, but one that was particularly dear to my heart, the world of *Top 10*. This twelve-part saga about the city of Neopolis and its super-powered citizenry had impressed me from the first moment I encountered it, in its monthly publication, as the perfect blend of humor, drama, satire, parody, homage, and genuinely speculative conceits. It seemed to me that this series exemplified everything that was best about Moore's writing, and the art-form of comics in general.

When I came down off my initial high, though, I realized the enormity of the task before me.

I now had to write up to Moore's level, or bring shame and disgrace down upon not only my head, but also upon the magical world of *Top 10*.

Now, trying to match a genius wizard at the top of his game is no small task. I quailed and quaked for some time before I began. But I finally decided that if I immersed myself totally in the characters and milieu, used all my experience as an SF writer and a comics reader, and took up the project with clean hands and dedicated heart, then I would achieve, if not total success, perhaps at least an honorable adequate aping of the master.

As things transpired, I believe that I landed more on the major success side than otherwise. Not to laud myself overmuch—as I write, the first issue has not even appeared in print, and confirmatory public response is nonexistent—but upon recent re-reading of my five scripts, and upon seeing the completed version of script one, with magnificent art by Jerry Ordway and the titantic lettering of Todd Klein, I am inclined to think that I channeled Moore's trademark sensibilities rather well. My extension of the *Top 10* mythos does honor, I hope, to the pre-existing characters, and generates new characters and riffs of the same quality.

What could account for such a lucky outcome? Moore did not counsel me during the writing. He saw the scripts for the first time only after they were all finished, and then had only one revision request. I had killed off a major character, and he wanted this character to survive. I amended the climax accordingly. But if his gracious imprimatur meant that

I had managed to honorably uphold his precedent-setting work, then how did that happen?

Only, I think, because Moore crafts his work so strongly and cleverly, and puts so much of himself into it, that any subsequent, responsive, semi-talented writer such as myself can use the massive granite foundation stones of his stories to easily build additional levels of narrative. His characters and their relations are so deftly limned, and the plot possibilities of his scenarios so rich, that extending the lines he has already graphed out is almost an automatic process, like plugging new numbers into a sturdy algorithm.

Not that I didn't put my own spin and twist on Neopolis. I think my version of his city is fleshed out in ways that Moore chose not to pursue. And my use of his characters involves putting them through certain transformative moments he had yet to plumb in his handling of them. Additionally, my SF background lends a more science-fictional air to the series, as opposed to a strict superhero ambiance.

But all my rookie patrolman victories would not have been possible with having as a partner the veteran cop Alan Moore, riddled with bulletholes and scars, canny and wise, humane yet unblinkerred, by my side.