

It's October 1981, and a young comics fan rides his bike to a nearby 7-11 to pick up some comics. On sale is the newest issue of one of his favorite series, DC's *The Brave and the Bold*. Even with a limited amount to spend, B&B was almost always a blind buy, no matter the guest-star, especially when Jim Aparo was drawing. This particular issue—*Batman and the Earth-Two Robin*, menaced by Prof. Hugo Strange—looked especially like a winner, so it was grabbed off the spinner rack with no further thought.

A short time later, this young comics fan is lying on the floor of his parents' basement, ready to dive in to that afternoon's purchase. The cover to *The Brave and the Bold* is opened, and for the next half hour or so, the kid is whisked away to the magical concept known as Earth-Two, following along breathlessly as the *Darknight Detective* is forced to form an uneasy bond with that world's Robin, the No-Longer-Boy Wonder, to stop the aforementioned Hugo Strange from exacting a plot of murderous revenge. The story, brought vividly to life by Jim Aparo, is powerful, exciting, full of everything a superhero comics fan could want: compelling moments of characterization interpolated with brilliantly executed action scenes, ending on a note of mystery. No doubt, this issue of *Brave and the Bold* is a complete winner, worth every penny of the 60-cent cover price. The kid flips back to the credits page (something he usually only glanced at, if at all) to look at what writer is responsible for this masterpiece. "Alan Brennert," he reads to himself. "I wonder who that is? I've gotta find what other comics he writes."

Of course, at that tender age, that young comics fan—me, of course—had no conception that people who wrote comics did anything else, so I spent the next few years on a fruitless search for the elusive series where I could read this Alan Brennert guy's work on a regular basis. Every so often I would stumble over a comic-book story he wrote—"To Kill A Legend" from *Detective Comics* #500, or "The Autobiography of Bruce Wayne" from *The Brave and the Bold* #197—and each time I would be transported back to that basement, reliving that sense of excitement and wonder, completely confident I was about to be told one hell of a story. It wasn't until I got a little older that I realized that Alan Brennert was writer and producer for television (winning an Emmy for his work on *L.A. Law*), and author (winning a Nebula for the short story "Ma Qui"), who only dabbled in comics, essentially only when he felt like it.

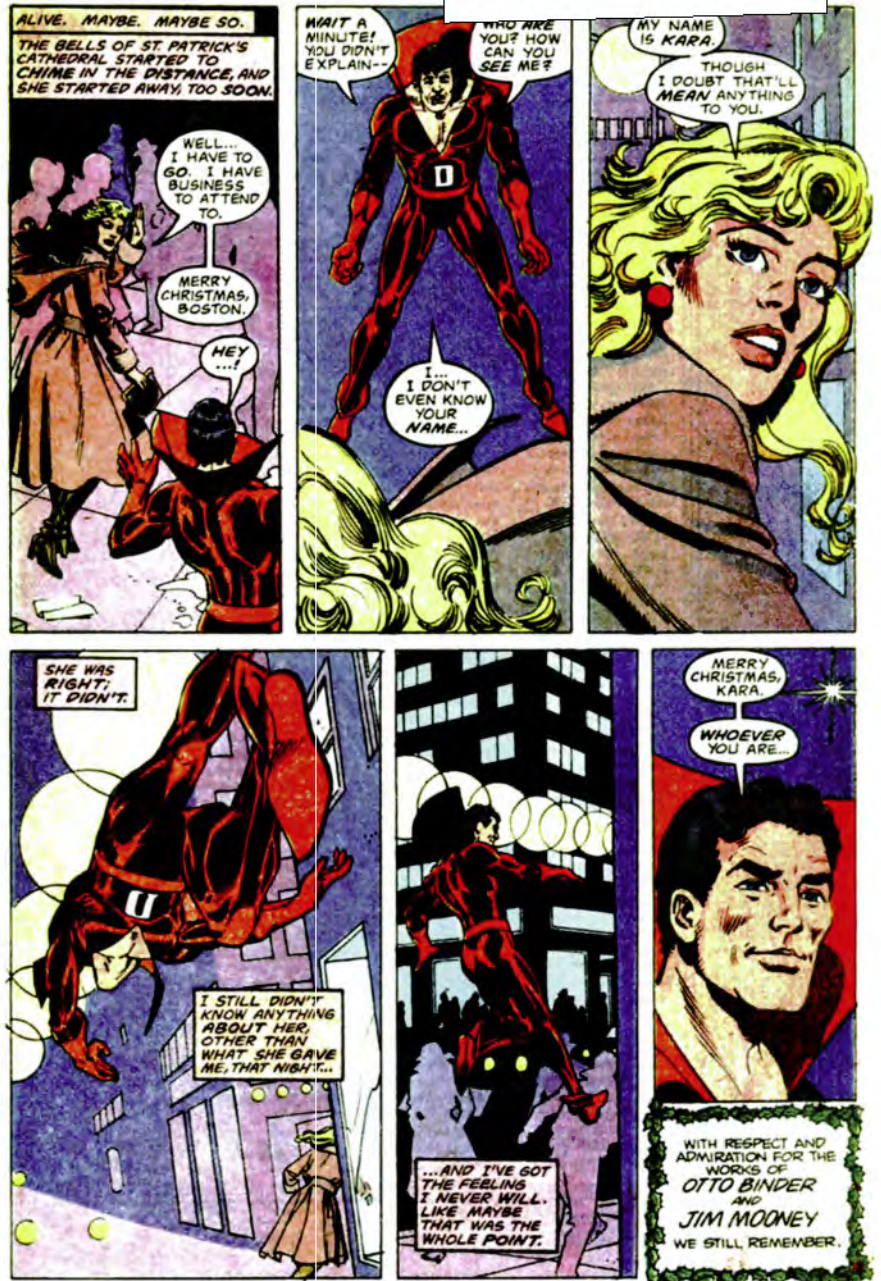
I eventually tracked down his complete comicography, consisting of only 13 comics over 13 years. I was stunned at how consistent it was—not a single bad story in the bunch. To put it in more concrete, mathematical terms, if Alan Brennert was a baseball player, he'd be a player who only got to bat 13 times, but in those 13 at bats, he hit five home runs, two triples, two doubles, and four singles, never getting out once. A player with an average like that would have a bronze statue at Cooperstown.

Thanks to the magic of the Internet, over the last decade I have gotten to know Alan and tell him how much his comic-book work meant to me. A little while ago, it occurred to me that Alan had never really been interviewed in depth about his comics work, and I wanted to change that—both he and the work deserved the look back. So in July 2014, I asked Alan to appear on my show, *The Fire and Water Podcast*, and he graciously agreed. As we discussed, Alan's career as a comics writer seems to have a period at the end of it, but I prefer to think of it as an ellipsis...

— Rob Kelly

THE Alan Brennert INTERVIEW

conducted by Rob Kelly



Gone But Not Forgotten

The concluding—and controversial (among Superman creative personnel)—page to the Alan Brennert/Dick Giordano Deadman tale from *Christmas with the Super-Heroes* #2.

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“Based on a story by...”

Brennert’s first comic credits: the Osira two-parter scripted by Martin Pasko in *Wonder Woman* #231 (top) and 232 (May and June 1977). Cover art by Michael Nasser (Netzer) and Vince Colletta.

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ROB KELLY: *At the time that you first wrote your first comics, which were—you plotted those two issues of Wonder Woman, #231 and 232 (May and June 1977)—and then Martin Pasko wrote the script. What were you doing at the time and how did you get into comics that first time?*

ALAN BRENNERT: Well, I have to go back and explain that I’ve actually been reading comic books since I was six years old. I talk about this in my novel, *Palisades Park*. There was a stationary/candy store called Pitkoff’s in Cliffside Park, New Jersey, where I lived, and my friend Miriam Salten—she and I were the best readers in our first grade class—we used to go to Pitkoff’s, which was owned by her grandfather. She was in charge of opening up the comic books for the week. We would buy the new comics, then go over to her house and read them together. I vividly remember the two of us reading “The Death of Superman,” the classic Jerry Siegel “imaginary” story, and we were just in absolute *tears* as we read it. Still my favorite comics story of all time. Later, I wound up getting into comics fandom through Marty Pasko; he and I were among the many “letterhacks” who wrote in to Julie Schwartz’s letters columns; I happened to mention his name in a letter to *Justice League*, and he contacted me. It turned out we were both living in New Jersey, in towns that were roughly adjacent to one another, Haledon and Clifton. He sent me this letter and asked, “Hey, how’d you like to get together with another enthusiastic fan and do a fanzine?” So we published a fanzine together, called *Fantazine*, which ran for four issues from 1970–1971, and soon I was off to college in California and Marty went to college at Northwestern outside Chicago. But by 1976, Marty had come back to New York and was working as a professional comic-book writer. I was a professional science-fiction writer; I had published a number of stories in SF magazines and anthologies and was nominated for the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer in 1975. I was making a living—sort of—off my fiction, and also from working part-time at Richard Kyle’s comics/science-fiction bookstore in Long Beach. But even so, I was a starving student and I could always use money. Marty knew that and offered me the opportunity to plot a comic book for him, for which I’d get paid a hell of a lot more than I was getting paid from the SF stories I was selling. [both laugh] So I plotted what was originally going to be a *Superman* story but wound up getting repurposed into a *Wonder Woman* story when Marty took over writing that book. It happened to fall in the period after the *Wonder Woman* TV show (set in World War II) debuted, and DC had switched the comic-book continuity to that of the Earth-Two *Wonder Woman*—allowing me to insert the Justice Society of America, [Rob laughs] a group I’d loved ever since they were reintroduced in the Silver Age (but more about that later). Anyway, it was essentially a very kind gesture on Marty’s part to get me a little bit of extra money. Flash forward: A few years later I broke into television writing, and one of my earliest pitch meetings was at *Star Trek Phase II*, an abortive attempt to relaunch *Star Trek* as a weekly syndicated series.

KELLY: *Right.*

BRENNERT: I came close to selling them a story I called “Eclipse of Reason”—involving the Medusans from the original series episode “Is There in Truth No Beauty?”—when the whole project fell apart and morphed into *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. But I still had this story outline, and around 1980 or ‘81, Marty was working on Marvel’s *Star Trek* comic and needed a plot for his next issue, so I was able to return the favor. I said, “Hey, I’ve got *this*. What do you think?” And he liked it and used it.

KELLY: *Now it makes sense!*

BRENNERT: And that’s how we wound up collaborating. (We also collaborated on a *Fantasy Island* episode a couple of years later, but that’s another story.)

KELLY: *I always wondered how you ended up doing [Marvel’s] Star Trek #12 (Mar. 1981). It just seemed random... why that issue of Star Trek?*

BRENNERT: And it’s been reprinted in a really shoddy trade paperback recently, too.

KELLY: *Really? Oh, geez.*

BRENNERT: Yes. IDW came out with a reprint of all the Marvel *Star Treks*, and none of us who wrote or drew those issues got any payment for it. And to add insult to injury, Marvel’s plates most have been, like, horribly deteriorated, because it was the worst reproduction that you’ve ever seen in a comic-book trade paperback.

KELLY: *It’s a good story. I reread it not that long ago and it reads like a classic episode of Star Trek. I definitely feel like I could have watched that in 1968 with all the actors. It has that feel to it.*



BRENNERT: Thanks. I thought Marty's script was very good. He did have to change the Medusans to "Phaetonians" because Paramount hadn't licensed Marvel to use any of the alien races from the original series (a silly restriction, and one that DC did away with when they licensed the title).

KELLY: Well, that's good. Okay, so your first solo book—your first solo story—is, of course, "To Kill a Legend" for Detective Comics #500 (Mar. 1981). At least chronologically, printed-wise, that's your first one. Is that the first one you wrote?

BRENNERT: That was the first script, yeah. And it came about because Paul Levitz was an old friend of mine. He was actually Marty's roommate for a time in New York. He was in L.A. for a visit—I think it was early in 1979—and we got together for dinner. He had just become editor of the Batman titles. At some point when I was just daydreaming about things, I had come up with this idea that I thought would make a good Batman story. So I told it to Paul and said, "If you'd like to have one of your writers adapt this, feel free." He looked at me and he said, "Well, you're a writer. Why don't you write it?" [Rob laughs] I said, "Well... okay." I'd never written a full-length script for a comic book before but I was writing plenty of TV scripts, so I just followed the format of Marty's scripts because I still had copies of those. (Although I think I used a bit less scene description than Marty does in his scripts.) I had just gotten off *Buck Rogers*, which was a fairly hideous TV staff experience, so to recover I took a vacation at the Club Med in Playa Blanca, Mexico. And I recall sitting out by the pool plotting this Batman story in between taking dips in the pool and drinking fruity tropical drinks. Rough, huh? So I wrote the outline for Paul, he liked it, approved it, and sent me into script. I wrote the script, he said he liked it, and I figured it was going to wind up as a fill-in issue somewhere. The next thing I knew, Paul told me that he had scheduled it as the lead story in *Detective* #500, and I was totally stunned! This was honestly the last thing that I had expected. But I was very pleased, and I was thrilled to hear that Dick Giordano was drawing it; I had been a fan of Dick's for a long while. I even talked to Dick while he was drawing the story and arranged to purchase some of his original pages.

KELLY: It's a great story from beginning to end, but the kicker is the ending, where he is still going to be Batman but he'll be a sort of a happy Batman. He won't be a grim Batman.

BRENNERT: Mm-hm.

KELLY: On an episode of the Super Mates Podcast, hosted by my friends Chris and Cindy Franklin, we talked about that story and I said I wanted to keep seeing adventures of that Batman! [Alan laughs] Happy Batman! That would be interesting! Now, was that part of the story? Did you have that at the beginning or did you have that at the beginning and sort of write to that moment? Or was it just there the whole time?

BRENNERT: It's hard to say. I can't remember right now whether I conceived the ending before I began writing the story. I probably did because my usual process in writing novels is that when I conceive a story, I know the beginning, I know the ending, and I have at best a hazy idea of what's in the middle.

KELLY: It was funny. You mentioned that Paul put it in the front of *Detective Comics* #500. Obviously, Paul knew what he had when he got it and DC knew what they had when they got it because they reprinted it a year later in their *Best of the Year* [digest] stories. I didn't read it in the original *Detective* at the time, I read it in the digest when they reprinted it. But it felt like everyone knew right off the bat that—"Oh, boy. This is a killer, this one." [laughs] It's kind of good to know DC knew even at the time that this was a winner. They knew what to do with it.

BRENNERT: I was very flattered. There were some other very good stories in that issue of *Detective*. There was the closing story—the Deadman story—where Bruce meets his parents in the afterlife. That was pretty touching, too, so I was in good company.

KELLY: Yeah, and [The Shadow's] Walter Gibson has a piece in that book! That's pretty amazing, you know?

BRENNERT: When I saw the cover for the first time—and the contributors were listed in alphabetical order, and there was my name, like the second or third one because it started with "B"—I remember thinking that all across the country, comic-book fans are going to be looking at this and going, "Who the hell is Alan Brennert?" [both laugh]

KELLY: I've said this before. The first comic I ever read of yours was *Brave and Bold* #182. I remember reading it and really enjoying it at that time, [but] I thought, "Who wrote this?" At that age, you don't think that people that write comics do anything else. You just think that's their job. I was, like, "Who is this guy? What other comics does he write?" I didn't realize that no, he doesn't really write there. There's no other series that you're writing. But I was desperate to find whatever book you were currently writing because I was thinking, "Boy this story's really good! I gotta read more of these!"

BRENNERT: I think I was probably the first television writer to make a hobby of writing comics. I can't recall anyone else... I mean, certainly some comic-book writers had written for television, but I don't know of any for whom it was the other way around.

KELLY: So... you've written 13 comics so far. Let's say it's 13. I'm not ready to say it's totally 13. [Alan laughs] But four of them are *The Brave and the Bold*—#178 (Sept. 1981), which is the *Creeper*; #181 (Dec. 1981), which is *Hawk and Dove*; #182 (Jan. 1982), which is the *Earth-Two Robin*; and then #197 (Apr. 1983), which is *Catwoman*. When you were approached to do the first one—say, the *Batman and the Creeper*—was the team-up already set? Did they come to you and say, "We want you to do *Batman and Creeper*. Do you have a story?"

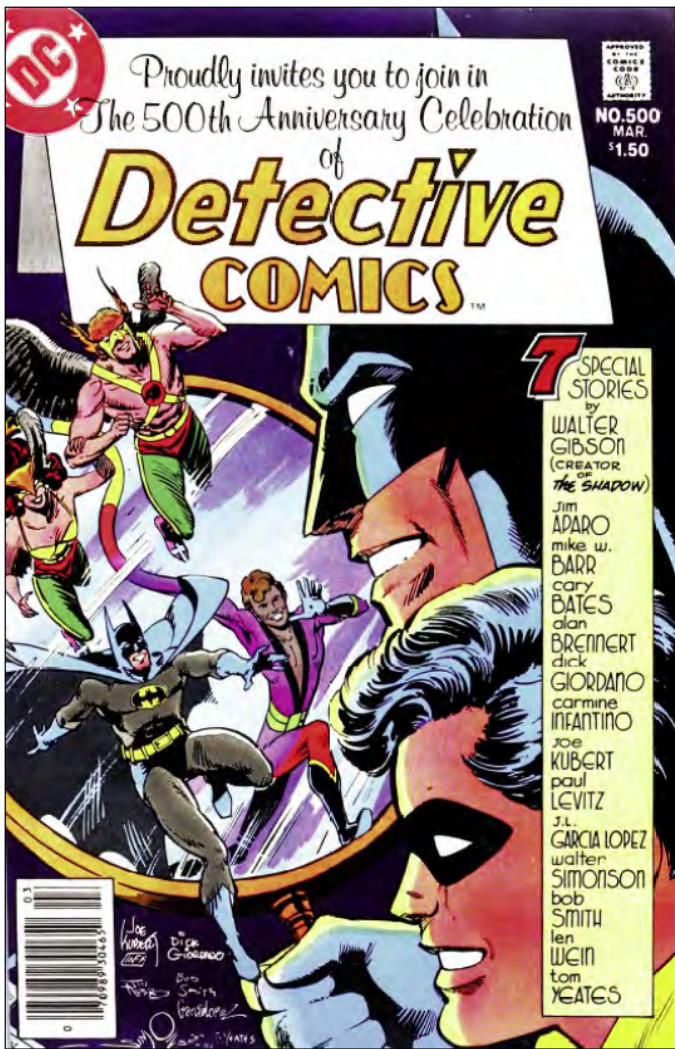
BRENNERT: No... no. It came about because Dick Giordano took over the editing of *Brave and Bold* from Paul Levitz. He obviously knew my work from "To Kill a Legend" and he called up and said, "I'm doing



Boldly Going

Alan and Martin collaborated again on this tale in *Star Trek* #12 (Mar. 1981), when the *Enterprise* was docked at Marvel Comics.

Star Trek TM & © Paramount Pictures.



Brave and Bold. Would you like to write a script or two for me?" I immediately said yes. You have to understand that I was a huge Charlton fan. I discovered Charlton Comics in a little soda shop in the next town up from me in New Jersey; I'd never seen them anywhere else. [Rob laughs] And I just fell in love with them! Steve Ditko, Jim Aparo, Pat Boyette, Pete Morisi—these really distinctive artists, the whole feel of that [Action Heroes] lineup [edited by Giordano]. It was not as copy-heavy as Marvel but it was a little bit more adult in some respects than what DC was doing at the time, and I really became a huge fan of them. In retrospect, I look back and I realize that what I was doing on *Brave and Bold* was, I was working with Dick Giordano, my stories were being penciled by Jim Aparo, and my first two team-ups were Creeper and the Hawk and the Dove, which were Steve Ditko creations. So in a way, I was trying to recreate that Charlton experience, or at least that late 1960s experience when Dick moved to DC and edited Ditko's books. So yeah, it was my idea to do the Creeper. It was *certainly* my idea to do the Hawk and the Dove, because by that time they had been completely forgotten by everybody at DC, which is why I decided to age them out of sync with the rest of the DC Universe. I figured, "Who's going to care?" These characters hadn't been used in years, since an old issue of *Teen Titans*, and at that point, it seemed as though they never would be again because they were so... you know... of the '60s! I thought, "Well... let's run with that. If these are characters who are sort of stuck in the '60s, let's make them *literally* stuck in the '60s in

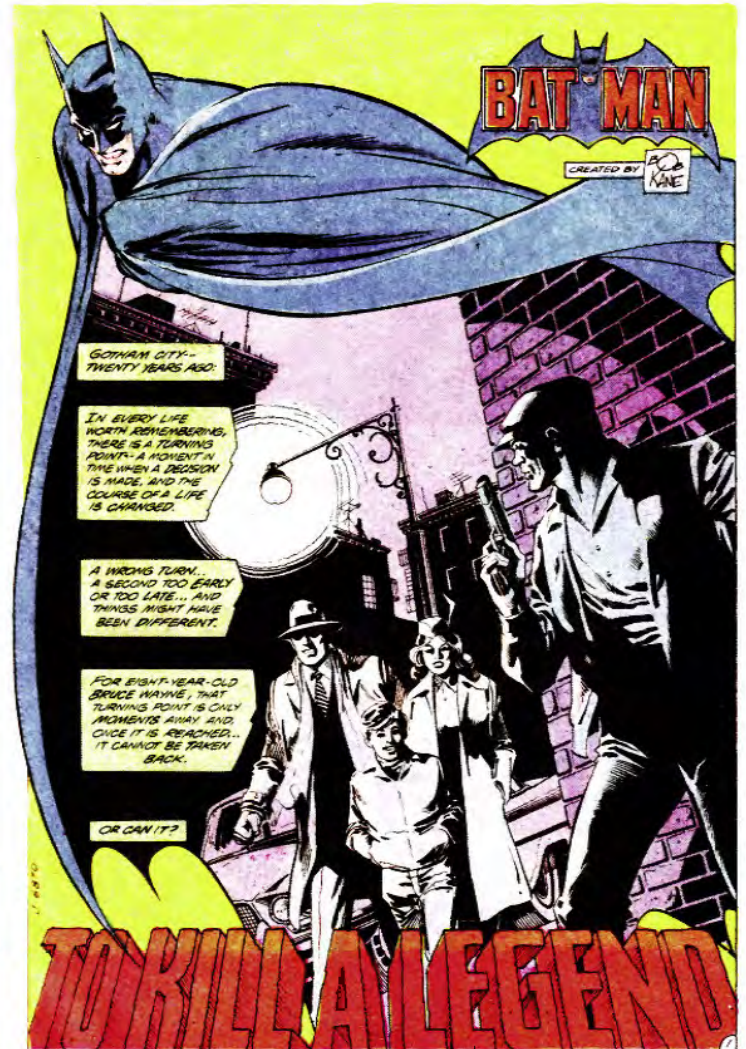
that they have *not* matured the way they should have. They've aged but not matured."

KELLY: Right.

BRENNERT: As for the Creeper, I know people love that story but it's probably my least favorite of all of my *Brave and Bold* stories. I was trying to create a Ditko-like villain and I think if Steve Ditko had drawn it, the "Origami Man" probably would have looked a lot more like what I had envisioned (it was visually inspired by the villain in the then-unpublished *Blue Beetle* #6, the "Specter"). Jim Aparo did the best job that he could, but basically it was, you know, [laughs] a villain made out of paper. My favorite part of that story was getting Jack Ryder back onto the air doing social commentary, which was my reaction to the right-wing politics in America at the time.

KELLY: Well, yeah. Thank God that's over with! [both laugh]

Now that you've brought it up, I want to ask you about this specifically. All your stories have some very real-world concern buried in them. All of your stories are about something other than the plot that's going on. The one with Hawk and the Dove is about aging and not growing up—to me, at least—and the one with Earth-Two Robin is about facing your own mortality, the one with Batman and Catwoman is about sort of a fear of death. Again, in terms of your writing process, how do you approach it? Is it like a theme that you want to get into with a particular story and then you build the sort of comic-book plot around it, or does the theme sort of naturally occur as you're writing out the story that you've come up with?



A Bat-Classic

"To Kill a Legend," produced by Alan Brennert and Dick Giordano for *Detective Comics* #500 (Mar. 1981), put the writer on the radar of many DC fans. To learn more about this anniversary issue of *Detective*, check out our own anniversary issue, **BACK ISSUE #69**.

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BRENNERT: It generally starts with the characters. I think about the characters and what I like about the characters and what I would like to see done with them, and it goes from there. The emotional through-line definitely occurs to me before the action storyline does. That was one of the reasons that I never worked with Julie Schwartz. I came to love Julie as a friend in later years, but back in the day I was going to do a Superman story with him. It was going to be the return of Sally Selwyn ("The Sweetheart Superman Forgot," *Superman* #165). I started pitching it to him in emotional terms, the "character arcs," and he was getting impatient, saying, "Where's the action? Where's the action?" This was never a question I heard from Dick Giordano. After that first story I did for Paul, all of my *Brave and Bolds* were basically just verbal pitches. I'd say to Dick, "I want to do something with the Creeper," and he'd say, "Fine. Go ahead." He was great to work with. Occasionally it would be a little bit more than that, a little bit more worked out, but generally the emotional through-line or the social comment I had in advance, and then I worked out the action beats.

If you look, my stories are not really action-heavy. They're more character pieces, but I think I have enough action in them to keep the story moving along and prevent it from becoming just talking heads. So that was sort of my process, and I learned quickly it was not Julie's, and I just let that assignment slide.

KELLY: I assume with the *Hawk and Dove* one where you said they've aged ... sort of out of continuity-wise, they've aged. I assume you know about the nod that Marv Wolfman did to that in a later issue of *Teen Titans*?

BRENNERT: I know, I know. [Rob laughs] It was funny, but I did think at the time, "Was that really necessary?" I also know about the nod that Barbara and Karl Kesel did in an issue of the revived *Hawk and Dove*, where they used parts of that story as dream or fantasy sequences. I finally met Barbara at a party at Len Wein's just a few years ago. She told me that they really loved my story and tried to figure a way to get it into the modern canon in some way.

KELLY: [laughs] Great! Talking about *Brave and the Bold* #182, it features *Batwoman*, *Kathy Kane*, and a lot of your stories—in fact, half of them—either feature a parallel world or specifically characters from *Earth-Two*. Is that because you mentioned earlier how much you loved the *Justice Society*? Is that just from a childhood thing, you just love those characters so much?

BRENNERT: Yeah, pretty much. I've loved the characters since they were brought back in *JLA*. I remember around that time, Julie would run these one-page text features in his various magazines—little histories of the Golden Age characters. They'd all have a small repro of the comic the character first appeared in—for instance the Spectre in *More Fun Comics*—and then a short history of the character in the Golden Age. I actually collected those. I cut them out of the comic and collected them into a scrapbook; they just fascinated me. The thing that I loved, what really imprinted on me as a child, was the sense of history—that these characters had histories, that there was this world where all these heroes debuted in the 1930s and '40s and they've since aged and grown in real time. It seemed to me, years later,

Ditko Double-Shot

Brennert's first two issues of *The Brave and the Bold* paired Batman with the Steve Ditko-created Creeper (left, in #178) and the Hawk and the Dove (right, in #181).

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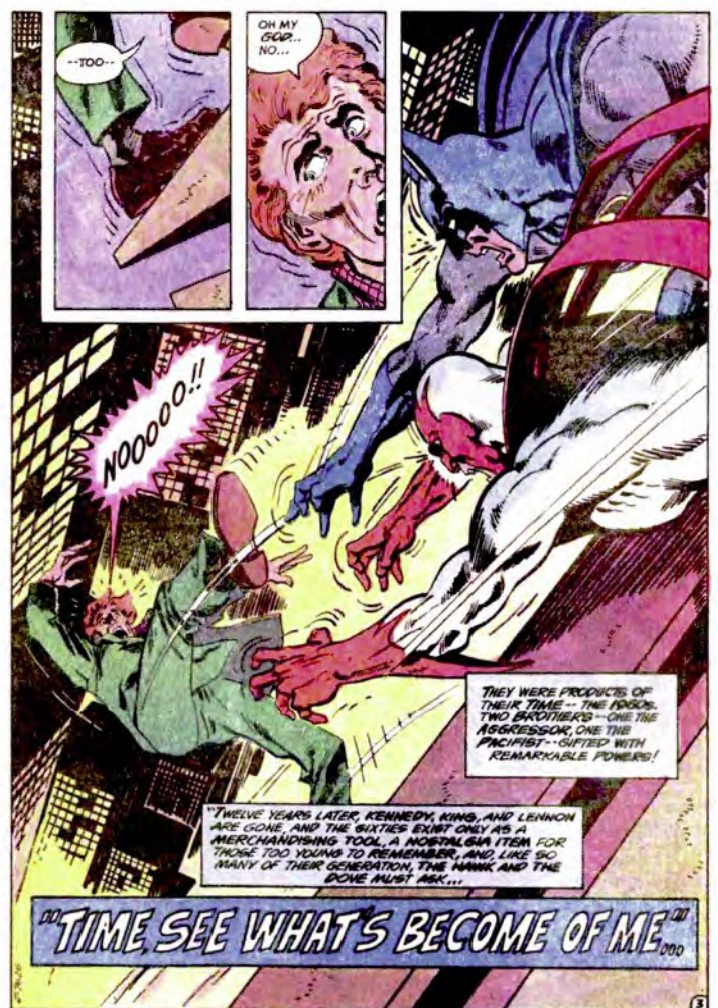
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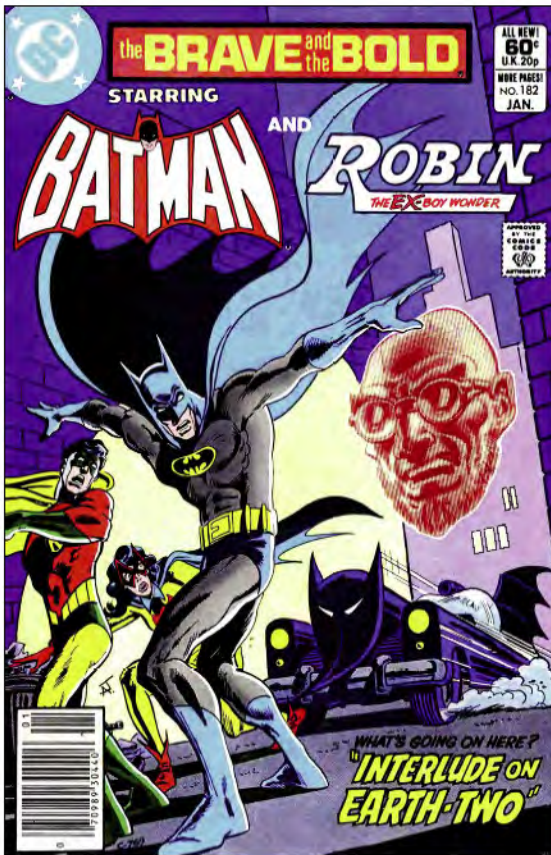
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All This and Earth-Two

Alan's love for DC's Golden Age characters is on view on these Jim Aparo-drawn covers to (left) *Brave and Bold* #182, starring Batman and the Earth-Two Robin, and (right) #197, featuring the Earth-Two Batman and Catwoman's romance.

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that DC didn't make as much of some of those characters as they could have. I was a great admirer of what Gerry Conway, Paul Levitz, and Joe Staton did in the revival of *All-Star Comics*. There was this feeling in that book that these are characters who are middle-aged, they have wives, husbands, some of them have children ... time has moved on for them. They were allowed to become more real, more human, than most of the Earth-One characters, who were locked in to being merchandisable, and thus unchanging.

KELLY: Right.

BRENNERT: You couldn't have Clark and Lois actually get married back then. They had to stay exactly the way they were. So I loved the freedom of being able to use these Earth-Two characters, to show them aging and the decisions that they made in their lives. Sometimes they were good decisions, sometimes they were bad ones. That held a great appeal to me. I also just liked the idea of alternate worlds in general, mainly for the same reason.

I wrote an entire novel, *Time and Chance*, with chapters alternating between two parallel worlds—one man, two lives. So that concept was very powerful to me. And I did love the Justice Society. In fact, *Brave and Bold* #182 I had originally conceived as Batman teaming up with the JSA—but at that time, Roy Thomas was DC's Earth-Two editor, he had approval over where those characters could appear, and he did not really want them to have many appearances outside his books. He wanted to keep the continuity, which is understandable.

So then I had to figure out—I want to do an Earth-Two story, but how do I do an Earth-Two story without the JSA? I started thinking about the Batman family and I thought, well, I could do the Earth-Two Robin. I didn't think Roy would object if I did that. Batwoman came as a secondary thought while I was writing it. "Wouldn't it be cool if there was a Batwoman on Earth-Two?" That was partly in response to the fact that she was sort of unceremoniously bumped off on Earth-One. I thought, "You know, she deserves a grace note." So I brought her in. I was taken to task for this in a fanzine by E. Nelson Bridwell because I had the story occur in 1955 and in the DC Universe, Batwoman didn't appear until 1957. My attitude toward that was the same, as it turns out, as Denny O'Neil's. When Denny and I had dinner about ten years ago, we talked about this and he said, "I always assumed that time flowed differently on Earth-Two," which was exactly how I'd figured it. Because if you

actually try to apply real time to the Earth-One/Earth-Two continuity it just doesn't work! Robin's, what, eight years old in 1941, so by the time *All-Star* is revived in 1976 he would have been 43, 44—which was not how he was portrayed—so I just figured, nah! Time flows differently relative to each parallel world.

KELLY: You mentioned giving *Batwoman* a nice sendoff. I have to assume that was part of the impetus behind *Brave and the Bold* #197, which was really your last *Brave and the Bold* because the book was canceled three issues after that. I read that story again—beautiful art by Joe Staton and George Freeman. The artwork is just gorgeous. It feels like ... I mean, obviously you couldn't have planned this because I don't know if you necessarily knew it was happening, or maybe you did, but the *Crisis* was only two years away at this point and they were going to get rid of there ever being an Earth-Two Batman. This feels like a nice, Autumnal sendoff of this character. And when you look at it from that perspective, it feels like, "Let's give him one last hurrah before we start to erase him from our publication history."

BRENNERT: Believe me, that was not in anyone's mind. The story came about at a pool party at Mark Evanier's house after a San Diego Con. I don't go to conventions but I would occasionally go to Mark's post-San Diego parties. [Rob laughs] So I'm in the pool with Len Wein, I'm meeting him for the first time, and he says that he just took over *Brave and Bold* and do I want to write an episode? I said, "Sure." Notice I keep saying "episode." My TV roots. I said, "Sure, I'll write one." I'm not sure whether I suggested right then and there, "How about if I do the Golden Age Batman and the Golden Age Catwoman?" I don't recall if I proposed it then or later, but I chose it because it was a backstory that hadn't been told. Paul Levitz had created the Huntress and wrote a sort of condensed version where we find out that Bruce Wayne married Selina Kyle, but I wondered, "How did they get to that point?" That's quite a leap, you know? Even allowing for a lot of sexual tension between them. So I proposed telling that backstory and Len said, "Sure. Go ahead." I talked to Paul before I did it because I was trying to make sense of Catwoman's chronology, in particular this whole business where she got amnesia. She was an airline stewardess and she got amnesia and became the Catwoman. Sure, happens all the time. I remember saying to Paul, "Wow, this really is contrived. I wonder how I can get around that." And Paul had the brilliant notion—what if she

When Bruce Met Selina

Old foes become new lovers on this remarkable page from Alan's "The Autobiography of Bruce Wayne!" From *The Brave and the Bold* #197 (Apr. 1983). Art by Joe Staton and George Freeman.

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was lying? [Both laugh] I said, "Well, of course!" and it all fell into place from there.

The thing I'm most proud of in that story is the origin that I gave Selina Kyle, which sort of became canon for the Golden Age Catwoman for the brief time she had left. And also that scene where Batman gets burned on the back and takes his shirt off and Selina says, "My God, you've got all this scar tissue," and he just sort of shrugs it off and says, "Oh, that. Yeah, 15 years of fighting will do that to a person." That was the first time, I think, that anybody had remarked on any superhero at DC having anything like permanent wounds. Superman would lose his powers and he'd get a black eye, but he was always fine by the end of the story. I thought, "But in the real world this guy's got no superpowers. He's got to be pretty banged up." Years later, Alex Ross did a painting—

KELLY: Right, right.

BRENNERT: —which he credited as, "This is based on a great Joe Staton story." Well, yes. Joe did great artwork, but that was my idea, Alex. Thank you very much.

And then the image later turned up in *Batman Begins* or *The Dark Knight*, so that was kind of cool, to see something that you wrote become so firmly established in the mythology.

KELLY: Yeah, it's absolutely become part of the character's backstory that he's all scarred up. There's a similar thing with *Kingdom Come*. I don't know if you ever read that miniseries?

BRENNERT: Oh, yeah. Loved it.

KELLY: Where Aquaman talks about how he runs 70% of the world! Every writer has quoted that. Every single Aquaman writer. Mark Waid just threw in this little line and it's now just part of the character. I remember reading *Brave and the Bold* #197 when it came out in 1983 and I literally remember reading that and going, "Yeah! Of course!" I'd never thought of it before, but of course! Bruce Wayne's body is going to look horrible, and you have to wonder what the guys at the Gotham Country Club think when they see this guy. Like, what is this guy doing in his spare time?

BRENNERT: He keeps his polo shirt on.

KELLY: [laughs] Yeah. I mean ... Good lord!

BRENNERT: That was what I was trying to do in all my stories. I tried to think: What would these characters be like if they really existed? It was the Marvel approach, obviously, but DC—even by the early 1980s—had not yet fully embraced that. They were trying; I admired Steve Englehart's Batman and JLA stories, especially the way the heroes called each other by their real names, something I picked up on. But it wasn't until Marv Wolfman's *New Teen Titans* that we started to get, on a consistent basis, more flesh-and-blood human beings in DC stories. I just tried to take that one extra step toward reality. Then Alan Moore came along and took, like, 12 extra steps and showed us all just how far you could go!

KELLY: You mentioned Marvel and it's the perfect time. I wanted to ask you about *Daredevil* #192 (Mar. 1983), which is only your second Marvel comic and your only solo credit on a Marvel comic. And it is the first issue of *Daredevil* following Frank Miller's big run. How did that come about that you'd end up writing an issue of *Daredevil*?

BRENNERT: Basically ... nobody at Marvel wanted to follow Frank Miller. [Rob laughs] Honestly! Denny O'Neil, who'd read my Batman stories, called me and said, "Look, I like your Batman stories and Batman is kind of similar to *Daredevil*. I was wondering if you'd like to write an issue?" He had no idea that *Daredevil* was actually one of my favorite, if not my favorite, Marvel character, especially as drawn by Gene Colan. I love *Daredevil*, love the idea of a blind superhero, love the idea that he's a lawyer by day and a vigilante by night. So I immediately said yes. I'd been reading Frank Miller's run on the book—which was really wonderful—so I knew what had gone before. But I also didn't try to write it exactly the way that Frank did. I tried to keep a continuity and a style similar to what he did, but I also threw in a little bit of the bantering *Daredevil* that I loved as a kid, when his dialogue was written by Stan Lee. It was just a great lot of fun to do although the circumstances of writing it were a little odd. I came down with the flu and had simultaneous deadlines on both *Daredevil* and an episode of *Fantasy Island*. I swear, there were days I wasn't sure if Mr. Roarke would be swinging around a flag pole [Rob laughs] or *Daredevil* would look down to find Tattoo calling, "Da plane, da plane!"

I was very, very flattered that Denny had offered this to me, especially because back in my days as a letterhack, I said some not very gracious things [Rob laughs] about Denny's Justice League stories. I think Denny is one of the greatest Batman writers ever. To my mind he wrote



the definitive Batman. But I think even he would admit that Justice League was not quite his forte. But apparently he forgave me all of that. I handed the story in and he immediately said, "This is great! Want to do another?" And I said sure. Unfortunately at that time I was going through some personal problems—a close friend of mine had passed away suddenly and it was causing me to suffer some depression and writer's block. When it became apparent after a week that I was not going to be able to wrap my mind around this story, I called Denny up and said, "Denny, I'm sorry." I explained the situation to him and he said, "Don't worry. This is very professional of you to call me with this much notice. I've gotten this call sometimes a day before the deadline!" [both laugh] He knew the idea that I'd come up with and he wound up writing the story himself and put a little thank-you to me in it. At the time, Marvel didn't want writers to edit their own stories, but he just had no choice but to write it himself. Yeah, I would not have minded doing more *Daredevils* but my schedule then was getting pretty busy. I started writing for *Simon & Simon*, and after that I went on *Twilight Zone* and I just didn't have time to do any more comic books until around the end of the '80s.

KELLY: *There you go. Perfect segue here. Your next story was your—I don't want to say it's your crowning achievement, because there's a bunch of crowning achievements here—but the Christmas with the Super-Heroes #2 (1989) story with Deadman, drawn again by Dick Giordano. Warning to anyone who hasn't read it, I'm gonna spoil the ending but you should have read it by now anyway! Even if you remove the kicker ending, the story itself, of Deadman, is wonderful, about all you put Deadman through with an angle I don't think I'd seen in a Deadman story. How did it come about that, at the end of this story, Deadman talks to Supergirl who had been—at that point—completely erased from DC continuity?*

BRENNERT: Well, yes, and I was pretty pissed off about that, actually. [Rob laughs] Really, the way that *Crisis* was originally supposed to have ended was that everybody—at least the heroes that went back to the beginning of time—they, at least, remembered the Earth-Two heroes and Supergirl. Then when John Byrne decided that he was going to completely reboot Superman, it was decided, well, Supergirl never existed. To me that seemed like not only kind of a repudiation of a great character that meant a lot to many of us growing up, but also a repudiation of the work of the writers and artists who created her stories. Sort of a kick in the teeth to Jim Mooney and Otto Binder. So when [editor] Mark Waid asked me to do this Christmas story—which, incidentally, was done after my *Secret Origins* story but was actually the first one that saw print—

KELLY: *Oh, wow. Okay.*

BRENNERT: —I conceived the somewhat seditious idea of doing a Deadman story and at the end I would sneak in the ghost of Kara Zor-El. There have been rumors circulating out there among the fans that this was done without the knowledge of anybody at DC; that it was Mark Waid and me sort of slipping it in past management. But it was drawn by the editor-in-chief and vice president of the company! [Rob laughs] In fact, Mark said when he brought it in to Dick to okay it editorially, Dick read it, clutched it to his chest and said, "Mine!" Which was very flattering. Dick did a great job; he drew Kara in a way that in retrospect is recognizable as her, but would not tip readers off the way it would have if, say, Jim Mooney had drawn her.

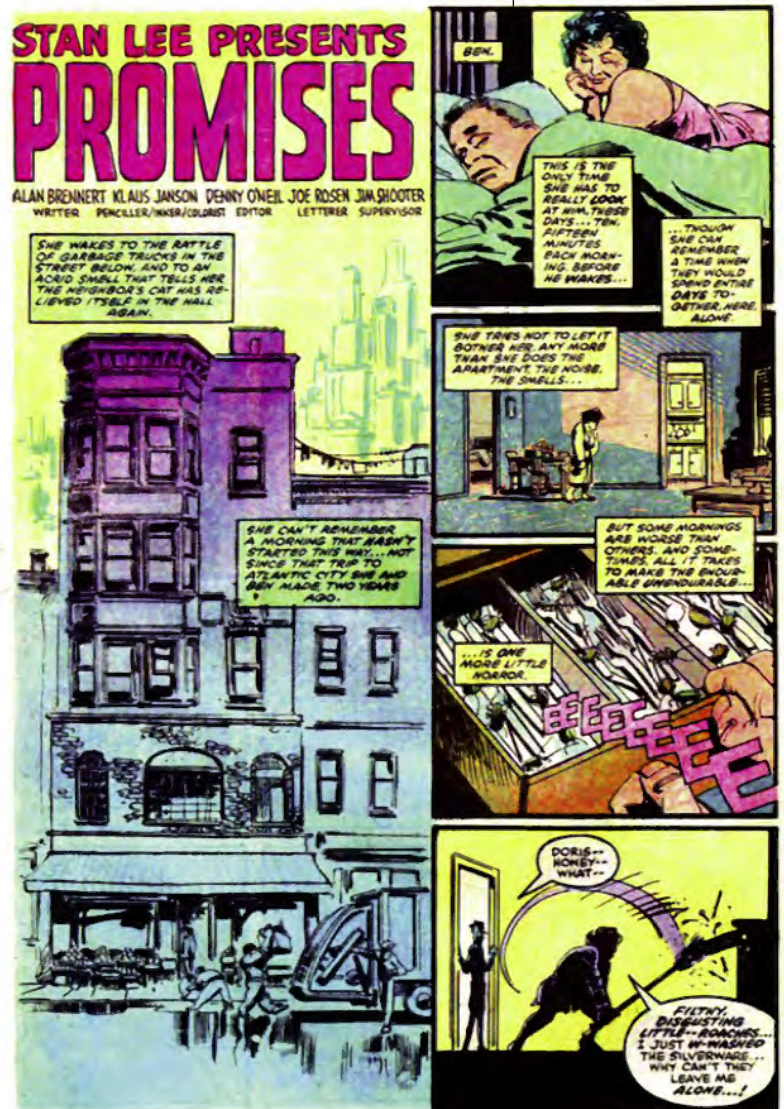
So, yeah. It was approved. It was sent to all the group editors. Mike Carlin signed off on this. Where the trouble came in was when the freelancers working for the *Superman* books saw this and said, "Well, wait a minute. We've been saying all along that she never existed and now you say you have this!" They were really quite distressed about this, and I can understand it; they felt sandbagged, which was not our intent. Some even went—I was told—to see Dick and said, "Okay, we have a way to make this part of continuity. Over in *Justice League Europe*, Power Girl is in a coma right now, so how about if we say that this was her astral self [Rob laughs]



"Nobody at Marvel wanted to follow Frank Miller!"

...but Alan Brennert did it anyway! Cover and title page to Alan's issue, which took place immediately after Miller's celebrated *Daredevil* run: issue #192 (Mar. 1983), drawn by Klaus Janson.

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that was projecting itself to Deadman and that's who he meets." And Dick—God bless him—said, "Guys! It's just a nice little Christmas story. End of story." Again, it was just intended to be a nice grace note for the character. Her death in *Crisis* was fine, but what was done to her later, just unmaking her? I thought she deserved better than that, and happily, that eventually became part of DC continuity: The story is cited by John Wells in his "Post-Crisis Events" done for the *Absolute Crisis* hardcover edition. And years later, Peter David did the same thing—he brought back the spirit of Kara Zor-El in one of his Supergirl-Matrix stories.

KELLY: *Is it too far to reach to assume that your dog Kara is named after Supergirl?*

BRENNERT: You know, I don't know how many people will believe this, but—yes and no. She had that name when we got her! We adopted her from her trainer; her original name was Montana, but her trainer gave her the name Kara, with a "K," because she said it was Hebrew for "second chance."

KELLY: *Awww...*

BRENNERT: I've never been able to confirm that, but Marty Pasko tells me he recalls hearing the same thing from his days at DC: that someone, maybe Jerry Siegel, named her Kara because Argo City was her second chance. That gives me chills. In any event, my wife wanted to call her Molly but I protested, "No, no, we have to keep the name! Kara is a noble name, she sacrificed herself to save the universe!" And as Paulette so often does, she just sighed patiently and said, "Yes, dear. I understand." [laughs]

KELLY: *Wow, yeah!*

BRENNERT: But we *did* add "Zor-El" as her middle name.

KELLY: *That's great! So ... you mentioned the Secret Origins story, which is "Unfinished Business," which ran in the final issue of Secret*

Origins (#50, Aug. 1990). Again you've got Joe Staton and Dick Giordano, so you've got a twofer there...

BRENNERT: By the way, I forgot to mention that I actually requested Joe for the Batman/Catwoman story because I loved his work and I knew him through Marty. He happened to be in L.A. right after I had requested him, so he and I had dinner at Hamburger Hamlet and went over the story together. It was one of the only times—just Joe and Norm Breyfogle—that I worked directly with the artists.

KELLY: *Yeah, Joe Staton, one of the best guys ever to do it! Not only are the stories great, but you really had—Aparo, Staton, Klaus Janson—you had a really good string of artists doing your stories.*

BRENNERT: Yeah, I was lucky.

KELLY: *So how did the Black Canary origin come about for Secret Origins #50?*

BRENNERT: Mark Waid again. Mark had just become an editor at DC. He called me up, left word on my answering machine in Los Angeles. I was on vacation in Hawai'i. I got his message, called him back, he said he was editing *Secret Origins* and would I be interested in doing a Black Canary origin? At first I turned it down. I thought, "Aw, I don't know. That character's never really done much for me—aside from the fishnets."

So my then-girlfriend and I went down to breakfast and sometime during breakfast, as she put it, I "went away." My eyes became glassy as I stared into the distance, realizing, "Well wait a minute. In this new DC Universe, there are two Black Canaries, mother and daughter.

And the Golden Age Black Canary didn't go off to Ragnarok with the rest of the Justice Society. Why was that, I wonder?" I suddenly realized this could be an interesting story so I called Mark Waid back and asked, "Is it still available?" I pitched him my take on it and it became the origin of two Black Canaries and the way that the mantle was passed from one to the other. And to make it more dramatic—and because it just seemed like the right thing to do—I had the estranged mother dying and Dinah reconciling with her at her bedside, thanks to the kind intervention of the Spectre.

The two high points for me were when Wildcat is talking about his girlfriend, Irina, back in the '40s, and how she got pregnant and had his baby, Jake. And one of his foes, the Yellow Wasp—who I mistakenly referred to as the Golden Wasp; so sue me—had kidnapped him and basically tormented Wildcat with the knowledge that he would never see his son again. And Wildcat admits, "You ever wonder why so many



Deadman's Best Friend

(left) Title page from the Deadman tale in *Christmas with the Super-Heroes #2*, by Brennert and Giordano. (right) Alan and his dog, Kara Zor-El. Photo courtesy of Alan Brennert.

Deadman TM & © DC Comics.



The Story Behind Black Canary

Title page to Brennert's contribution to *Secret Origins* #50 (Aug. 1990). Editorial mea culpa: Ye ed was the mop-up editor on this tale, and regrets that the creative role of its conceptual editor, Mark Waid, was diminished in the credits. This story would not have been possible without Mark.

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JSAers did not have children? This is the reason. It's a dangerous life." I was also setting up something that I thought surely someone would pick up on: the son! Geoff Johns knew about that story. Way back when he was working for [film director] Dick Donner, he told me he and David Goyer had read it and were using it as a "bible" of sorts for their JSA run. But Geoff never had Wildcat meet his son, just someone who'd known his son. I don't know, seemed an obvious thing to do, but maybe he didn't want to do the obvious thing. And then at the end I got to put in a little more seditious stuff implying that the souls of everybody from Earth-Two still existed somewhere. Some of this got edited out after Mark Waid left his editorial position at DC, but I think there's enough of it still there that you get the idea.

KELLY: Oh, absolutely! And again, another nice sendoff for this character that—as you said—I think most people forgot. She was never really part of the JSA stories at a certain point and then you had the other version that was going around, so ... yeah.

Now, the next thing you did was arguably the splashiest thing you've ever done for a comic book. It was an Elseworlds book! A solo Elseworlds book, which was *Batman: Holy Terror* (1991). I'm hard-pressed, when I first read it, to sort of connect it up with what I knew about your stories. I find that even though your stories have all the dramatic stuff, they seem generally upbeat, and this is ... heavy! This is a very heavy story and for anyone who hasn't read it, it's basically an Elseworlds story where Batman lives in this universe that is a theocracy. Where did this come from?

BRENNERT: Well, I was approached again by Mark Waid, who started out as editor; it was taken over by Denny O'Neil. It actually was the first to bear the Elseworlds logo, after *Gotham by Gaslight*. I did it partly for the opportunity to work at the graphic novel length, which I had not done before, and also for the freedom of the format, because this would *not* be a Code-approved comic book. And that was something that I was interested in tackling. The story was darker than any of my other ones, but it had a more serious lynchpin: an alternate America that was a theocracy. The subject was something I felt pretty strongly about—you can trace it all the way back to my Jack Ryder commentary in the *B&B* Creeper story. I believe passionately in the separation of church and state, and I think that when there's confusion between them, it's bad for the country and bad for its citizens. But without going into politics too deeply, this was just my way of finding an interesting background that would have some meat to it—and it just turned into a darker story. I thought, well, of necessity, Batman has to be the only hero. He has to be the first superhero in this world. So what happened to all of those other heroes of the Justice Society and the Justice League? So I set about finding, you know, *horrible* ways to dispose of them! [laughs]



KELLY: Yes, you did! [both laugh]

BRENNERT: My favorite being the misdirection of the Green Man, who I was trying to get everybody to think was either the Martian Manhunter—because Dr. Erdel was involved—or Green Lantern. It turned out, of course, to be Superman, dead from kryptonite poisoning (as in that classic Jerry Siegel story I read when I was seven).

KELLY: Right.

BRENNERT: So, yeah, it was darker. Also, it was a more difficult story for me to write because I was used to writing these 20-, 22-page stories and I didn't really have to work the plot out that much in advance. I was able to write the script pretty much as I went along. But this was 48 pages, and I found myself having to sit down and lay it out. I'd take out a sheet of 8½ by 11 paper and lay down a grid and actually start to sketch in some of the action so that I had an idea of what the pacing for the first ten or 15 pages was going to be. It was something that I'd never done before and at times it really didn't work—there's a two-page sequence in the beginning where there's a



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BATMAN/HOLY TERROR COVER



ARTIST: NORM BREYFOBLE EDITOR: DENNIS O'NEIL

**Alan's
Elseworlds Tale**

Courtesy of Heritage
Comics Auctions
(www.ha.com), Norm
Breyfogle's original
cover painting
for Brenner's
1991 Elseworlds
graphic novel,
Batman: Holy Terror.

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much exposition that the word balloons are practically crowding characters out of the panels. I should have just let Norm lay out those pages by himself. He could have paced it a lot better. It was not as pleasant a writing experience, partly because of the format and partly because I had committed myself to writing a very dark story. But it was a theme that I cared about and it did sell pretty well, something like 75- or 80,000 copies.

KELLY: *There was never any trouble at DC for writing this type of story? Because this could be perceived as pretty offensive to some people. I mean, just touching religion in comics at all is a live wire. So there was never any issue at DC with it?*

BRENNERT: I never heard a word. I was fully expecting to get some flak about Thomas and Martha Wayne being arrested for “counter-reproductive activities” because I really was kind of pushin’ the envelope with that. You have to understand, by this time Alan Moore had come along and the landscape, the parameters of what was doable in comics, had changed completely. I wanted to try to push that envelope a little bit in my own way. But, no, I heard no complaints from DC about it. Denny O’Neil liked the story very much. Norm Breyfogle liked the story very much. I think I got maybe two letters about it. One was from a very serious Catholic who objected to my libeling his Church, and I had to point out to him, “No, this is *not* the Catholic Church. This is a Protestant theocracy.” He didn’t know quite as much about history as he did about religion.

The other was a fan letter that Denny said they got at the office which was from a nun in New York City who said, according to Denny, that it was “one of the most faith-affirming stories that she had ever read.”

KELLY: *Wow!*

BRENNERT: Denny told me, “I’m not sure I’d be willing to go that far.” Neither would I, Denny! But that was how I was writing it: that Bruce genuinely had faith, but that faith had been co-opted and corrupted by the Church. To me, that was the only way to write the story. The fact that I was an agnostic didn’t interfere with that any more than when I wrote from the viewpoint of a nun in my novel *Moloka’i*. If you’re writing about people of faith, you have to respect that faith. Anyway, those were the only two letters I know of that we received. Go figure.

KELLY: *One of the things that’s surprising about it is if you just read it in a one sentence summary, “In this Elseworlds story, Batman lives in a theocracy,” your brain immediately goes, “Well, he won’t be a believer! He’s fighting against it!” And yet one of the nice things about the story is, no, he is! He is a man of faith. He just conflicts against the corruption of it. It’s a strange thing to read Bruce Wayne talking about belief in God. You never see that in any Batman comic, so that was a nice switch-up. It really is not what you’re thinking you’re gonna get.*

BRENNERT: Bruce was not aware that the Church killed his parents; he thought it was just a random street crime. So to me, his growing up to become a priest was a logical extension because he’s lost his parents. Who does he have to turn to? He turns to God. And his, ironically, is the purer form of faith than that of this corrupt theocracy.

KELLY: *Before we move off this, I have to tell you this. It breaks my heart that the one time in your comics career that you wrote Aquaman, you wrote him as a vegetable floating in a giant water tank and he has no dialogue! You’re breaking my heart, Alan! [laughs]*

BRENNERT: Sorry. I liked Aquaman. He wasn’t one of my favorite characters, but I knew he had to be included. There’s even a mention of a forced mating with Lori Lemaris, so let me just offer my deepest apologies to you and all Silver Age fans.

KELLY: *Yeah, yeah. There’s a bunch of your letters in the old ‘60s Aquaman comics...*

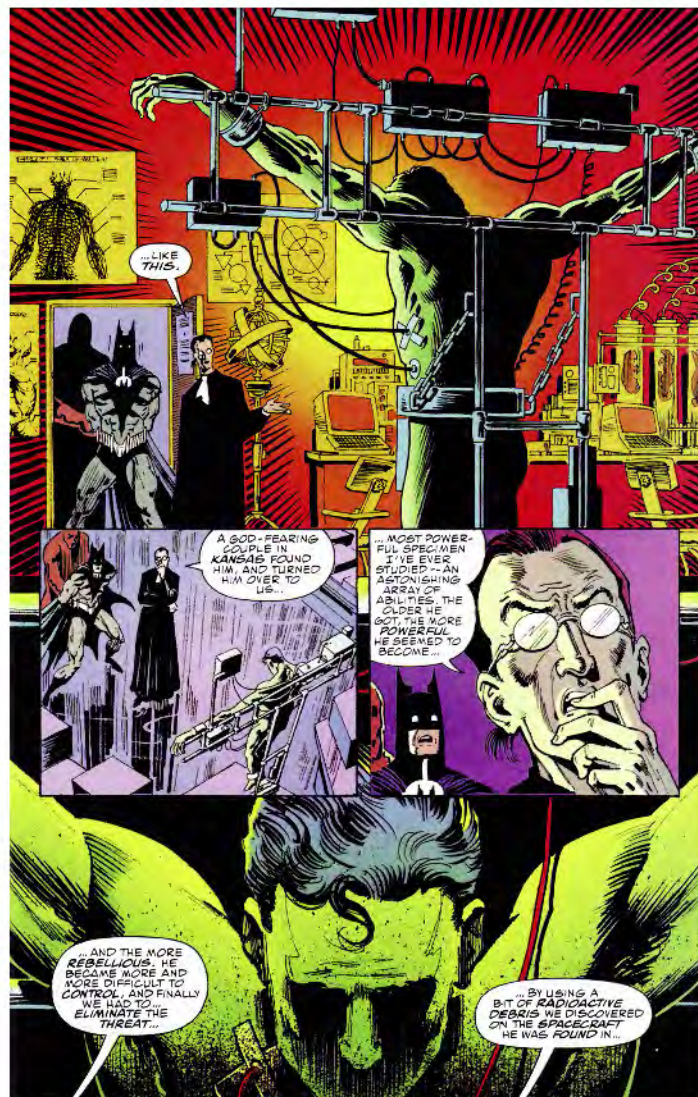
BRENNERT: That’s true! I really loved Steve Skeates’ run on that book. I thought it was great. Plus it was Jim Aparo!

KELLY: *And [editor] Dick Giordano! So there you go! All the Charlton guys together. That’s my single favorite run of Aquaman still, those Skeates stories from the ‘60s.*

Well, let’s move on to your very last ... SO FAR! Let’s hold out hope! Your so far last credit in comics is in Batman: Gotham Knights #10 (Dec. 2000). You did the black-and-white story called “Guardian” and it was drawn by—I’ll explain this in a second—José Luis García-López, Praised Be His Name, which is something we always say every time we mention his name on the show because we just all love his work so much! Talk about your string of great artists! I mean ... Good Lord! And this is another Earth-Two sort of story because you’ve got the Earth-Two Green Lantern in here.

Now, how did all this come about?

BRENNERT: Mark Chiarello, the editor of *Batman: Gotham Knights*, called me and asked if I’d do an eight-page *Batman: Black & White* story. And as it happened, I had this idea. I’d been following the new DC Universe as it had been reconceived and I thought, “You know, they haven’t done a story about how Alan Scott met Batman.” I mean, they’re *both* in Gotham City; when did they meet? What happened when they did? So I decided to tell that backstory—again, a story I wanted to see myself. And it was fun to write because I played Green Lantern as the nearly omnipotent figure that he was in James Robinson’s *Golden Age* miniseries. I even borrowed James’ idea that Alan retires because it was getting too easy for him—he could do anything with that ring and he needed to struggle and strive like a human being again, *be* a human being again. It was fun playing the two characters, who are so different, off each other. And the closing scene in Little Paris, when Bruce’s talking about taking a rollercoaster ride with his father ... well, that was really me



A Cross to Bear

Kal-El fares poorly in Brennert and Breyfogle’s *Batman: Holy Terror*.

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The Future Mrs. Gordon

Brennert and Giordano introduced Barbara Kean in their *Detective* #500 story, as shown here. In this interview, Alan discusses his reaction to the addition of Barbara Kean to the cast to TV's *Gotham*.

TM & © DC Comics.

talking about taking a rollercoaster ride with my dad at Palisades Park when I was a kid.

I handed in the script, and the first artist that I was told was going to be drawing it was Dave Gibbons. I thought, "Wow, Dave Gibbons! Cool!" Months then go by and Mark Chiarello calls me and says, "Well, Dave sent it back. He can't do it after all. He's got too much else to do. But ... I just gave the script to Gil Kane."

KELLY: Oooooo!

BRENNERT: I fairly swooned at the thought of having one of my stories—much less a story with Alan Scott!—drawn by *Gil Kane*. I thought, "Can't do better than that"—and then Gil Kane promptly died. I swear it wasn't my script that did it. Finally the story, which I was beginning to think of as some kind of cursed chain letter, wound up going to García-López, who's a terrific artist. I love what he did with it, I thought it was an excellent job, but ... you know, part of me still feels like, "Oh, God, I came *this close* to having *Gil Kane* drawing Alan Scott and Batman!"

KELLY: How could you not? It's a great story and another great angle.

I guess now's the perfect time to mention [this...] You've come up on the Internet. This thing went viral about your issue with DC Comics currently involving the Gotham TV series. Now, most people have probably seen the article. It went all around, which is great. A lot of places picked it up. But for anybody who hasn't been following it, why don't you give a brief explanation as to what the issue is in terms of creators' rights, and specifically with you and the Gotham TV show?

BRENNERT: In "To Kill a Legend"—which was set in an alternate world that was about 20 years behind Earth-One—I created a character named Barbara Kean, who was the fiancée of Lt. James Gordon. I had Dick Giordano draw her to resemble her daughter-to-be, Barbara, and even gave her the same first name because I thought it was kind of cool to show that Babs got her beauty, brains, and even her name from her mother. There had been a nameless "Mrs. Gordon" that appeared twice in 1951 back on Earth-Two, but in the 30 years after that there had been *no* appearance of the Earth-One Mrs. Gordon until my story. Then, after that, DC retroactively named the Golden Age Mrs. Gordon "Barbara," so somebody there liked the idea. The character was picked up later by Frank Miller, who named James Gordon's wife "Barbara" in "Batman: Year One" (and I know Frank had read my Batman stories because he told me so in a conversation we had when I was writing *Daredevil*). Then Barbara Kesel—or Barbara Randall as she was then known—wrote a *Secret Origins* about Batgirl and further expanded her mother's character, who has since been referred to as Barbara Kean Gordon. She even appeared in a couple of the Batman movies—*Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*—although her appearances were pretty brief.

I didn't really think too much about all this until I saw that *Gotham* was going to be on this fall and one of the recurring characters was "Barbara Kean, fiancée of Lt. James Gordon." I thought, well *this* is just too close. So I emailed the executive at DC who was in charge of approving "equity." (If creators receive "equity" in a character, they are entitled to payment when it's used in other media, determined on a percentage basis.) But the exec turned me down, saying, "Well, the character's too derivative of her own daughter, Barbara Gordon, because you made her look like her and she even has the same name and profession. We don't give equity in derivative characters." I responded, "Mark Waid's character, Bart Allen, is derivative of Barry Allen and yet Mark tells me he's received equity in Bart and been paid for the character when it appeared on *Smallville*. And what's more, I know for a fact that you *do* make payments for derivative characters, just at a reduced percentage than for 'original' ones." I said, "Look, just give me a reduced percentage on the character. I've had a long and largely positive relationship with DC. I'd hate to see it end over a matter of a few hundred dollars." (I later learned that the actual fees were usually far less, more like \$45 per TV appearance for original characters and maybe half that for derivatives ones.) How did this exec respond? He stopped answering my emails.

Let me be clear: I was not in this for the money. I am hardly in desperate need of 25 bucks an episode. But as a Writers Guild member, had I created this character for a TV show, I would have automatically received payment for recurring appearances. And here's Warners, they're putting Barbara Kean's name and face on *bus stop advertisements*, for God's sake, and they're saying she's not an original enough character to warrant payment? Bullsh*t. That's when I decided to go public on Facebook. I figured if this is happening to me, it was probably happening to a lot of other creators, some of whom who



might really need that \$25 an episode. And I've since spoken with a number of comics creators who've said, "Oh, yeah. I've been screwed over in the same way by DC." Most of these writers are dependent on DC for their living and they're not going to make waves. I'm not dependent on DC for *anything*, so I thought *someone* should make some waves. I maintain that Dick Giordano and I *do* deserve compensation for the character. Since our story, there have been 52 instances of Barbara Kean Gordon being used in comics, twice in movies, and now as a supporting character on a TV series. So clearly, this character is of value to DC even though they're trying to disparage it as derivative (and dissemble about the fact that they do make exceptions and pay for such characters). I think it's pretty petty and sleazy when a company is willing to screw a creator over 25 bucks. And it's particularly disheartening to me because, under Jenette Kahn and Paul Levitz, DC was a standup company when it came to creator payment, and used to be one I was proud to be associated with.

KELLY: *The thing that bothers me when these things come up, all of a sudden comics fans become experts in contract law. Everybody knows, "No, no, no! That's not right." You don't know. You don't know what was signed. Second of all, there's a kind of blind "I don't wanna see how the sausage is made" mentality. "Just gimme the comics I want and give me the show I want and I don't wanna hear about how it gets made." Well, these are people! These are people that did this for their livelihood. Not so much in your case, but certainly others. It's troublesome.*

BRENNERT: It's troublesome to me, just as a viewer. The only Marvel movie I've actually paid money to see was the first *Captain America* movie because I knew that Joe Simon had made some sort of settlement with Marvel. But I didn't go to see any of the *Thor* or *Iron Man* movies because I could just not bear the thought of watching characters that were co-created by Jack Kirby and knowing that the Jack Kirby estate is not receiving a dime for that. That just interferes with my enjoyment of the film. *[Interviewer's note: Since Marvel's settlement with the Kirby estate, Alan says he is once again able to watch and enjoy Marvel films.]*

KELLY: *Yeah, yeah.*

BRENNERT: My little dustup with DC is just trivial compared to the Kirby estate not getting money and Bill Finger not getting credit for having co-created Batman.

KELLY: *I would imagine that—at least for the time being—you're never going to do anything for DC. I guess some big change would have to occur. Do you feel like you're done with doing comics? You've never done anything for an independent company. Would you ever be interested in that or is it just that DC and Marvel have these characters that you grew up on and that's what attracts you?*

BRENNERT: I have been offered projects at independents. Scott Dunbier, when he was at Wildstorm, offered me the opportunity to continue Alan Moore's *Top 10*, which I immediately said yes to because I loved that book. I thought it was one of the most imaginative, innovative, and wildly whimsical comic books that I'd read in years. I suggested doing a miniseries which would have been the Silver Age *Top 10*, the characters who were working at the Top 10 precinct in the 1960s. *[Rob laughs]* This was at the point that Alan Moore was just finishing the script for *The Forty-Niners* graphic novel, which featured the Golden Age Top 10. I had ideas of what I wanted to do—I wrote, on spec at Wildstorm's request, a whole proposal—but I didn't know how many of the characters from *The Forty-Niners* would survive into the 1960s, meaning would they be alive or not at the end of the graphic novel? So I just asked, will you please have Alan



tell me who survives so I know who I can use? Four months and many emails went by without my ever getting this information. Without even getting my *contract*. Finally, I got an offer from Paramount to go on staff at *Star Trek: Enterprise* and I could hardly turn that down when I still didn't even have a contract from Wildstorm and wasn't getting the information I needed out of Alan Moore. So I had to call up Scott and say, "Sorry, I just can't do this." I do regret that, not only because it would have been a lot of fun to do, but Jerry Ordway was assigned to draw it and I love his work. But I just couldn't get what I needed to start writing.

KELLY: *That's a real shame. I would have liked to have read that. But you're not ruling out that something could come up down the line in between novels that might interest you?*

BRENNERT: No, I don't rule it out completely. I don't really read many comic books these days. I stopped reading DC with the reboot because I decided my brain was filled with enough useless DC continuity as

Batman: Black & White

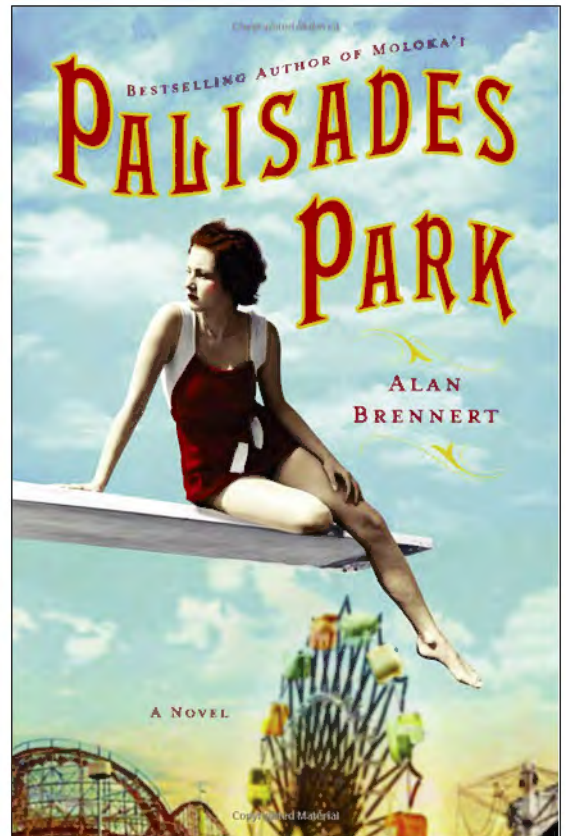
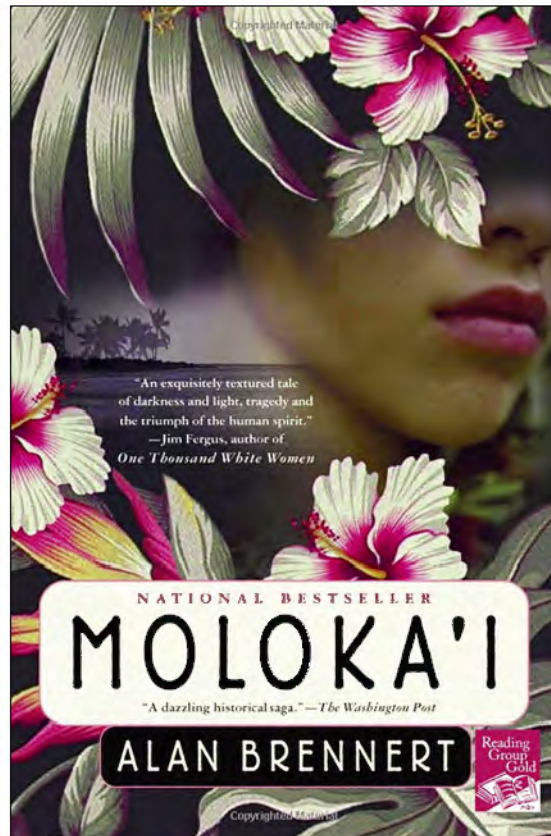
Gotham's guardians meet on this page from the Alan Brennert/José Luis García-López tale from *Batman: Gotham Knights* #10 (Dec. 2000).

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Recommended Reading

Book covers for two of Alan's novels: *Moloka'i* (2003) and *Palisades Park* (2013).

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it was. [Rob laughs] And yeah, I don't expect to do anything for DC again unless they surprise me and do the right thing by me and Dick. Marvel pretty much has the same work-for-hire terms, so... you know, if there's an independent out there and it's the right project, who knows? I might say yes.

KELLY: *Oh, that's good!*

So, during all this time that we've been covering with your comics, you were writing TV shows, you did the reboot of the Twilight Zone in the '80s which was such a great show, and then you talked about Buck Rogers, you wrote a couple episodes of China Beach, which was one of my favorite TV shows at the time, and you were writing novels as well! You had Time and Chance. What were other ones from that time?

BRENNERT: I did a novel called *Kindred Spirits*, which was published in 1984, then *Time and Chance* in 1990. (My first novel, which shall remain nameless, was published when I was 24. It was a paperback original and it was not me at my best. I hadn't started writing television at that point, and I really became a better novelist after becoming a TV writer because television taught me about structure.) After *China Beach* I worked on *L.A. Law* in the early '90s, just after *Time and Chance* came out. The book did okay in hardcover but flopped in paperback. After that I decided that I was not going to go back and write another fantasy novel. So I concentrated on Hollywood development work—screenplays, TV movies, miniseries, pilots. When I finally started thinking about writing another novel, I came across the story of the people of Kalaupapa, the leprosy settlement on the island of Moloka'i; it was a story that I had heard of, as a frequent visitor to Hawai'i, but the more I researched its history the more I realized that the full story had never really been told, and I became obsessed with telling it.

KELLY: *All right! It's a great book. I've read all the historical novels that you wrote, but that's a great book.*

BRENNERT: It was really a labor of love. I wrote it entirely on spec. It took me three years to write and my wife and I endured a fair amount of financial hardship, because I stopped writing scripts to write this humongous book. After I finished it I did pick up a couple of TV staff jobs, but by 2007 *Moloka'i* had sold enough copies (today, over half a million!) that my publisher was offering me real money to write another book, which became *Honolulu*. I've been a full-time novelist ever since. I do have a movie version of *Time and Chance*

which is theoretically alive; there's a studio that wants to do it, there's an actor that they want to star in it, and if he says yes, they'll greenlight the picture.

KELLY: *Wow.*

BRENNERT: But this has been going on for a very long time. My friend Michael Reaves used to say that glaciers melted faster than things moved in Hollywood. Well, now glaciers are *literally* melting faster than things move in Hollywood!

KELLY: *[laughs] I don't know why I'm laughing. It's not funny at all!*

BRENNERT: It's funny because it's true. So I'm waiting to hear on that and I'm also working on a proposal for a new historical novel.

KELLY: *Wonderful! Like I said, your last book—for anybody who doesn't know—was Palisades Park, which was a great read.*

BRENNERT: You can get it as a paperback, an e-book, an audiobook, large print—everything but action figures. And I should mention that there are a *lot* of comic-book references in the book.

KELLY: *There sure are! It would make a great comic book. They're doing more and more of these sort of novelistic, long-form graphic novels. I can see Palisades Park as a comic book! I think that would be interesting.*

BRENNERT: Hm. I never thought of that. That might be an intriguing idea.

KELLY: *Yeah, all the stuff with people diving. That's got a lot of visual to it that I can see being done in that format. I don't know. Something to think about.*

What are you working on now?

BRENNERT: Just this proposal for a new book. I'll get it out to my agent and from there to my editor, and if she likes it, I hope to be starting work on a new novel pretty soon.

KELLY: *Thank you, Alan. Looking forward to it.*

ROB KELLY is a writer, illustrator, and comics historian. He is the creator/EIC of The Aquaman Shrine, the co-creator/writer of the award-winning webcomic Ace Kilroy, and the creator/editor of the book Hey Kids, Comics!: True-Life Tales from the Spinner Rack, which features the story "Mahalo, Keniki" by Alan Brennert.



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