



XRAY

of a SAGA

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MIRROR
COMICS
STUDIOS

X-RAY of a SAGA

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1.

YOUR HEAD, YOUR HEART, YOUR GUTS, YOUR HANDS.

Everyone has a saga inside.

It is the starting point of a lifelong obsession if ever you get bit by a saga.

Most dreams of a saga will align with your passion and your gifts.

If you paint you will want to create the Sistine Chapel.

If you write music it's your *The Wall*.

For writers it's the Great Novel that will win them the Pulitzer or the Nobel, or turns into the next *Harry Potter* series.

Whatever.

Once it grips your heart, your eyes dilate, you have a ‘woah’ under your breath and you suddenly feel supercharged.

And it won’t let go. Not until you put it out in the world. And even then, it lives with you forever. And if you do nothing, it will turn to poison and make you bitter inside.

It’s a whole world that comes along after the first character, a full blown epic, in your mind.

It reveals itself over years, in dreams, in ‘aha’ moments of clarity. Sometimes it’s like catching a shadow, it seems impossible, but if you don’t give up, you inch ever closer, to these magic final words...



TO BE CONTINUED...

To be continued...

An epic is not one thing. It’s a series of things, a group of works, which, together assembled, make up a super-story.

Tolkien had Middle Earth, George Lucas had Star Wars – you know the drill.

Artists are known by their greatest works.

No matter what the medium, a saga fits itself to your talents and you have to listen, you have to have the vision, and the will, to make it real.

But we are never given the whole thing, we have to chisel away at the marble, tease out the words, storyboard the whole thing.

We use notebooks and song sheets and blank canvases or walls or toilet paper or the inside of our hand. And if you are lucky, it pretty much makes perfect sense in the end.

Mine was a comic book saga that would turn the funny book world on its head.

My saga, to look at it obliquely, being in the midst of creating it now, was clearly a product of my artistic influences and interests as a child.

I grew up absorbing The Little Prince animated series, the Goldorak anime [Grendizer], the original Star Wars trilogy, Astérix, X-Men, Tintin, Nintendo, Pink Floyd and Michael Jackson videos – oh and Ninja Turtles too.

There were also lesser known influences – the Michel Vaillant bande dessinée, random Heavy Metal magazines, Continuity Comics, Deathlock, Supertramp and Chris de Burgh.

By the time I became a teenager, my mind had blended all of these on high cycle and characters started emerging. They always had emerged, but this was different.

Because I could draw!

I drew every day from the age of 3. By the time I was 14, I'd created the first few characters in my epic. I had names, powers, designs, enemies, vehicles, clothes, special talents.

As I grew older I got better, the story grew more complex, and each year I told myself I'd be done the first issue after summer break from school. At age 17 I was offered an invitation to send drawing samples to Marvel Comics, but I had taken up the creator-owned comics ethos like a cause. It was my mission.

Since the Image Revolution of 1992, I have always been a champion of the creator-owned formula. I was a perfect clone to those original Image studios and artists, I could draw in a similar style, but I did not want to draw even *their* characters, I wanted to draw *mine!*

And the horizon kept providing and I climbed each new hill and explored each new valley, I would find this story if it killed me. And it nearly did.



3.

A SPECIAL KIND OF MADNESS

I was driven to madness looking to find this story, and the more it eluded me, the more I kept the backburner fires on maximum.

I searched the Tarot, the Zodiac, Zen Buddhism, Mythology, Divinity, books on business, books on art, books on spirituality. I sought within.

The problem was that I had no story to tell because I had not yet truly lived, I was simply too young for sagas.

I turned to other projects. Other collaborators. Other comics. Many of the bigger projects never got off the ground, but, when I whittled them down, the smaller ones succeeded.

Which led to bigger projects.

I had lived, loved, lost, so I took the leap.

So many times.

Abandoned novellas, failed projects reinserted into a greater matrix, so many false starts. 25 years later and I'm still tweaking it.

But I *have* begun...

It started with a script for 12 issues, then 50, then 26. Half a dozen projects mashed into one.

Then I started drawing. I could change the dialogue later, I had to start.

I walked away from my own public persona, away from the book signings and the conventions. And I've never been happier.

I've drawn over 220 pages so far – it will add up to 750-800 pages in the end.

It's not planned as a forever thing anymore – in 26 issues I can tell plenty of story if I keep editing as I go. It will have a beginning, middle and end.

And some things I commit to as they become real.

It's the way it has to be. But luckily I create in layers, and I can keep improving as I go.

So far... so good...

All I have to do is show up, try to get inspired, and I have to motor through the work.



LIGHTNING STRIKES TWICE

It's essential to motor through when lightning strikes.

What's fascinating about creative people is that they can make lightning strike twice.

And again and again. Magic just happens for them.

And then on some days you get nothing. It's infuriating.

The idea is to show up, every day, putter around with your pencil and something usually comes out.



5.

THE CITY OF IMAGINATION

I've learned my craft but that doesn't mean it's a key to the City of Imagination, you have to work for it.

And you get better. As I look back to even a year ago, I see a discernible improvement in the pages and the art that is on them.

What's great though is that I will improve them more when I get to inking them, so I can just keep going.

I have all sorts of lists and schedules, but no expectant publisher, so I'm left to my own devices. This has its advantages and its drawbacks in the end. It's a double edged sword.

Being left to your own devices is nice. I set my own hours, nobody shoots me in the leg. Good times.

But I wonder if I'd be more disciplined if I had an editor breathing down my neck.

All in due time. Editors can breathe down my neck for the rest of my life.

For now I'm free. And I'm loving it. And I still do my best.



ONE MORE MOUNTAIN ONE MORE OCEAN

So I'm aiming for the finish line, following the horizon... one more mountain, one more ocean.

As much as I'm naïve about the funny book finding its audience, I'm all business when it comes to the industry.

It will take a perfect pitch document, a good copyright lawyer, a great book, the works, and instead of jumping in my bunny slippers for a much deserved rest when I'm done, that's when I'll notch promotions into high gear.



THE NEW ROCK AND ROLL

Marketing is the new rock and roll, and as your efforts translate into sales, your publisher will thank you.

At the end of the day it's superhuman effort after superhuman effort. The art was in my bones, business I had to learn along the way.

But I love business and books on business. My genre is magic realism, fantasy and science-fiction, but my favorite reads are usually one book or another on business or spirituality or both.

I know.

It's weird. I'm weird.

If I hadn't gone to art school, I would have taken business administration in university, which would have been valid since I knew how to draw by the time I graduated high school. But I would not have experimented much with style, I'd still be a methodical [i.e. slow] artist. It would have created its own problems. I'm glad I went to art school.

And I'm glad that, since then, I lived enough that, finally, I had something to say in the end. Love, strife, loss, victories, failures, a heightened sense of intuition, it all came together as a real structure on top of which I could drape my saga.

In that sense, my story is semi-autobiographical. In a way I am the main character. He is braver than I am and saw more success earlier in life. But that doesn't mean it's all roses and heaven on earth.

We both suffered for our art. We both went through hell. And even though his destiny is cosmic in nature, doesn't make my destiny any less magical. We both aspire to be at the right place at the right time, and when we fail... we suffer – and the world suffers.

It's not easy to live with a saga in your head and heart.

Passion is half the battle, but it doesn't finish it for you.

It takes discipline, applied effort, it takes work – hard work – to get there.

I thought I would journal a little from the middle of my saga-making just in case I forget how hard – and rewarding – it is to bring it all to life.

I've done some writing and rewriting. I've done some penciling, I've done ink tests. I've done the whole thing as a thumbnail storyboard, and I've roughed in issues worth of layouts ahead.

And at every step I use what I call 'the funnel.'



THE FUNNEL

At the writing stage I'll have 20 ideas for a scene, and I can write it that way, but when I thumbnail sketch it, it is boiled down to its essence. I continue that editing when I draw a page based on that sketch. And I will tweak it when I ink. What starts out as a 20 point list of actions gets simplified until it's 5 ideas or so.

I feel like a sculptor chipping away at the stone – or a novelist enacting their fifth round of edits. There's a lot to be said for brainstorming, but when it comes down to telling a story, it can only go one way – the *right* way.

The funnel is the *key* to my progress.

This way I can start with a set of story ideas, and then stage it as if it were real. Sometimes the characters speak up and act differently than planned. Sometimes the world acts in such and such a way. It's grand.

The trick is to work in layers, like a painter.

Each scene has to contain within it all the next scenes and all the previous scenes. Each scene has to be full of meaning.

A blow to the head, a drive in the countryside, a kiss, a death, a birth, they all have to tell a continuous story. Continuity is everything. Or else it will feel unwoven, broken, it will not feel alive.

I look back at even the lightest scenes, and even they have a certain heaviness, progressively so as the scenes go on.



9.

MAJOR THEMES

When I started, I had a few major themes. The problem with huge themes is that they can get heavy. By the time I

finished my storyboard I realized that my original themes remained, in fact they dominated. Now the themes are more intense than ever. It's big. It's heavy. It's intense. But there's no going back now. I'm all in. And it's scary.

Because I feel that I am challenging cherished beliefs.

I don't want to cause a stir, but I don't think it can be avoided. I've delved into deep waters and all I can expect is being celebrated by some while others – well – having to deal with internet trolls. God I hate those guys. But that's life.

You have to wear the blinders and race forward like a thoroughbred horse. You can't worry about what people will say or do. You have to stay true to the story, or else it will bite you in the ass.

The story already *is*... in perfect balance somewhere in your subconscious. And if you mess with it, you'll be affecting your own balance. The effects could be devastating.

But if you stay true to your story, it will offer you the perfect horizon each and every day. Just enough to inspire you to draw a few new pages. Enough to write the next scene. Always just enough. And if you've finished that

day's work, you'll sleep like a baby, you'll feel whole and productive – you'll win.



A SAGA IS HARD WORK

Now drawing a comic book is not easy. You have to master a hundred different skills before attempting even a small project, even a single issue.

Layout, penciling, design, draftsmanship, perspective, anatomy, life drawing, folds, the list goes on and on.

Because of this, drawing a comic book is difficult, grueling work. And what's especially strange is that you cannot be content with a single drawing, you have dozens or hundreds more to go. You have to become like a machine, you have to be organized. You have to be dedicated and relentless. Mind you – drawing a comic or graphic novel is a magical thing. Instead of 5 pages of prose, you have a page of comics, the most cost efficient big budget movie offered as a series of stills.

But – enough about heaviness and hardships. Comics – or any saga I would imagine – builds things piece by piece, one step at a time.

When you start, you say to yourself, well that's a nice page, that's a nice scene, that's a nice issue, but it's not enough to soak in, you're just getting started.

Eventually you have enough building blocks that it starts to take on a life of its own. It breathes. It speaks to you – it feels like a real story.

Of course, you start as the boy in the closet, the dreamer on Tatooine, so you stop and wonder if it's ever going to get somewhere. Then there are encounters with other characters – cathartic encounters – and things start to move.

After a while, you just have to stay out of your own way. The story speaks to you in dreams and visions, it becomes a character in your own life. It starts telling you what it needs.

You never reach the horizon but you do get over the mountain, through the valley, across the sea.

The characters become friends, like they're real. And real people have an effect on the real world. Right now they only affect me, so I sometimes wonder what the world

will be like once I finally release these characters and chapters into the world.

Is the intrigue enough to keep you interested? Is the basic premise too long? I hint at what will come to pass – are readers picking up what I’m putting down in these pages?

Some people can calculate an answer logically. I am not like that. I use my experience on thousands of pages from other books to hone my intuition, and I use my intuition to push and pull on this project.

Sometimes my drawings are just right, sometimes superior, and sometimes downright bad, but I cannot stop for each false note – I tell myself I’ll fix it later – and I move on...

Such is the way of the cartoonist – never satisfied quite fully with the past, always looking forward to improving in the future.

In the end some of the drawings won’t be perfect, but as long as the overall project is excellent it does not matter. It’s the story that counts.

As my mentor often reminds me... perfection is unattainable, but excellence *is* attainable. So strive for excellence, and just let the project be.

There are good days, there are bad days, and the bad days remind you that you are human, that you are not perfect, and on good days, well, you think you're king of the world, and no one wants to deal with an ego tripping madman. Ha!



11.

EVERYONE HAS A SAGA INSIDE

If you have a saga inside, and the passion and talent to bring it into the world, I say, don't wait for it. Go after it with a baseball bat. When the story is ready, you will know, and it will take all of your wits and strength just to keep up. It will all go by very quickly even if it takes you years or – egad – decades. Once the story clocks in for work, hold on to your hats and ride the wave, ladies and gents.

I've never, in my life, tackled a project that was so big, that was so powerful, that takes such effort, but when I decided to go the distance it all started to make sense – my art, my skills, my life. This is what I was *meant* to do – the reason I was born.

That's a big statement to make, but ask yourself this : if you don't bring your saga into the world... who will? And will it still be true to your original vision?!

You need to begin to plan accordingly, and to hone your intuition to make the right calls along the way. Your whole body gets involved.

Your head, your heart, your guts, your hands.



12.

A PRAYER FOR YOUR SAGA

Right now I'm going to go back to my pages. If you are creating an epic saga in your genre and medium, I wish you the best of luck, and send the sincerest of prayers for you to succeed. The bards of yesteryear created great epics for their times, now's the time for us to define *this* time – watch out world : Everybody's got an epic inside.

Dominic Bercier,
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