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LINE OF FIRE REVIEWS

American Virgin #13

Posted: Friday, April 6**By:** Martijn Form**Print This Item**

Writer: Steven T. Seagle

Artists: Becky Cloonan (p), Jim Rugg (i) Brian Miller (colors)

Publisher: DC Comics/Vertigo

Plot: Part 4 of the 5 part "Wet" arc where Adam searches for the love of his life, who supposedly wasn't his murdered fiancée, Cassie.

Comments: (Classified! Medical eyes only!)

Psycho-analysis Session 359 (Friday 5th April): Sigmund Freud and patient Martijn F.:

Freud: You seem troubled?

Martijn: Yes, a bit. I can't get this comic book series out of my mind.

Freud: Comic book? Aren't you a bit old for that!

Martijn: In what era do you live? Comic books are better than ever, especially by this publisher called Vertigo. They make books for mature readers.

Freud: Go on

Martijn: Well there is this one title called *American Virgin*.

Freud: Hmmmm, American and Virgin. Isn't that a paradox?

Martijn: No, it isn't. Not everybody thinks about making love all the time.

Freud: Ehhm right. I think. But go on

Martijn: Well it's a really fascinating read.

Freud: Why iszz that?

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Martijn: It deals with a lot of themes that are pretty controversial in the comic industry. It's about this boy who is a Christian and a Virgin.

Freud: Isn't that a

Martijn: No, that's not a paradox. It's reality. And the way Steven T. Seagle handles the subject matter is admirable. Vertigo always publishes books that are off beat and pushing boundaries. There was one book called *Preacher* that was pretty wild, and it stepped over several lines that hadn't been crossed yet by a comic book.

Freud: Freedom of speech is a good thing.

Martijn: It is. It definitely is, but this book isn't subtle. It's there. It's right in your face. The way Becky Cloonan is drawing this book is gripping, edgy and dramatic. Her character expressions grab you by the throat. Her characters are strange, but at the same time familiar.

Freud: So your problem is that you are obsessed with Becky Cloonan.

Martijn: No, you do get it. I don't know her. I only adore her art.

Freud: Well, that can be a metaphor

Martijn: No it isn't. I'm happily married.

Freud: That can change.

Martijn: Well let's save that for another session, but *American Virgin* is intriguing. Not all of its issues have been gems. They aren't homeruns right away, but it steadily pulls you into this freakish world. Which somehow I like reading about.

Freud: So, you have a hobby. You like comic books. You like *American Virgin*. This keeps you off the streets eating donuts out of trashcans. Why do you need me?

Martijn: Good question. Maybe I don't. Maybe just reading *American Virgin* is therapy enough.

Freud: How does this make you feel?

Martijn: It's good for my wallet. Ha ha. That's what I feel. More money for comics.

Freud: Ehhmmm, an comic obsession maybe. You know that can't be cured. Anything else?

Martijn: Well there is one scene in issue #13 about a woman giving birth to a baby boy. And they actually show you the whole thing. And this makes me feel

TRINGTRING

Freud: Sorry, times up. See you next week.

Martijn:

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LINE OF FIRE REVIEWS

Bizarre New World #1-3

Posted: Monday, April 16

By: Martijn Form

Print This Item



Writer: Skipper Martin

Artists: Christopher Provencher (p), Wes Dzioba (colors & lettering)

Publisher: [Ape Entertainment](#)

Plot: Imagine if you could actually fly! What would you do?

Comments: Some surprises are bad, some are nice, but rarely are they excellent. Well, *Bizarre New World* is a wonderful surprise.

I haven't read many books from Ape Entertainment, but if this new title is representative of all their publications, I will definitely jump on board on some of their other titles.

Bizarre New World is one of the most enthusiastic comic books I have ever read. There is so much positive energy in this book that it will put a smile on your face for the rest of the day.

The main character in this story is Paul Krutcher, an average guy with a boring job who discovers that he can fly. Just like that. He isn't Superman or any other muscular hero who can fly at the speed of light. No, he's just a guy who can fly at a modest pace. He is more into donuts than the South Beach diet, and his personality isn't heroic at all. Paul is a sweet guy and a loving father. And when he is playing with his son, you wonder who the grown up is supposed to be.

So does Paul have a super power? Just imagine if you could really fly. Would you consider yourself as having powers? Well, Paul doesn't seem to think that he has a power. He has something unique, that's true, but it comes with many quirks that super hero comics are keeping secret. Did you know that when you fly high into the air that your ears will pop and hurt like hell? Or that, yes, as you are getting closer to the sun, it's actually freezing up there.

Paul doesn't have the mind of a brain surgeon. There is a wonderful and heart warming scene where Paul talks to his son, Sean, about what he would do when he could fly. The dialogue between them is realistic and enthusiastic, making this a memorable scene.

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Talking about good scenes, they aren't hard to spot in *Bizarre New World*. The creative team shows us that they understand the medium. The sequential art would have made Will Eisner proud.

Christopher Provencher has a keen eye for composition. His lay outs are well constructed, so they gain maximum effect on us readers. Actually, I was overwhelmed by the numerous panels presenting lovely story moments. Provencher must also love to draw facial expression because he brings the characters to life with them. I like the pencilling without the hard ink lines; it's got the same quality as Mike Ploog's style.

Wes Dzioba uses a good pallet of colors. It feels natural, and he keeps it basic but without being boring. He understands what it takes to make a night scene work and has no problem creating the right mood when the sun sets. There are a lot of colorists working at major comic companies who have don't have the first clue in translating a real sunset into a two dimensional medium.

Skipper Martin has written several scenes in this comic book that are funnier than most TV sitcoms. It's not often that I really laugh out loud while reading a comic book. With a title like *Bizarre New World* anything goes. Trust me, this book is hilarious.

All three issues are well paced and the plot twist in issue #3 is more than nice. This is the sitcom version of *Heroes*.

Issue #1 costs \$3.50 for a double sized issue, which is a bargain! I give high praise to Ape Entertainment for this mini series. So order your copy, buy this one and for once make this a hype that is really worth it.

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LINE OF FIRE REVIEWS**Civil War: Frontline #2****Posted:** Monday, July 3**By:** Martijn Form**Print This Item**

Writer: Paul Jenkins
Artists: Ramon Bachs, Steve Lieber, Leandro Fernandez,
Kano

Publisher: Marvel Comics

Plot: Three different ongoing storylines about Marvel's
Civil War through the eyes of two journalists.

Comments: The covers of the *Civil War* saga and all the tie ins aren't very pretty to look at. More that half the cover is done in plain grey, blue or red with white credits. It leaves the page with just a small portion of art work. I think Marvel should have chosen a different format, because I like great covers.

The cover of this issue of *Frontline* is an unmasked Spider-man not totally confident that he did the right thing, exposing his real identity. J. Jonah Jameson can't believe that the hero he hates has worked for him all this time.

He is lost in his own feelings, if he has any. On the one hand, he wants to expose heroes, but when Spider-Man does just that, he still remains the irrational person we know rather than the professional he should be.

He refuses to publish any story about Peter Parker. Ben Urich had a private conversation with Peter and wrote a story, but all of the sudden, Jonah isn't interested in selling newspapers. "Good people come clean. The bad ones make up lies and get exposed on national TV," says Jonah. And in his mind Spider-Man is the bad guy and not the hero we all like.

Journalist Ben Urich who also works for *The Daily Bugle* cannot believe it either. All those years working with Spider-Man without knowing it. It happens all the time. Murderers, terrorists and undercover informants do have jobs and family too. And when they are exposed, the people around them are as shocked as the people of *The Daily Bugle*. It's hard to imagine some one having a double identity. And the closer it gets in your community, the harder it hits you.

But now matter how hard it hits Ben Urich, he still can maintain his journalistic view on the matter. Sally Floyd, on the other hand, can not keep her own emotions out of her work. When Iron man forces Prodigy to comply with the Registration Act, she

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can no longer keep her professional perspective. She shouts that Prodigy is a good guy and not the bad one who must be brought in. Sure, her feelings are correct, but doesn't she have an obligation to make her statement in a news article rather than shouting on the street?

In the last issue she came forward as an alcoholic like Tony Stark, so they have a connection here. But this isn't followed up in this issue. She opposes Iron Man and his methods to bring Prodigy in and so ends the second part of "Embedded."

The whole issue of *Frontline #2* is a great read. I really like the storyline focused on Speedball in the aftermath of the Stamford devastation. He is treated as the bad guy with no human or super human rights. No lawyer. No nothing. Here is a great parallel to the prisoners on Guantanamo Bay. No rights. And no real accusation of what crimes they have committed. An excellent example of the strange action of humankind. Speedball is locked up in a prison where they can drink his blood for his part in killing 60 children. Reason doesn't live in this prison, and Speedball will face a hard time without his powers.

All the story lines in this book are connected with each other which makes this series so interesting. The last few pages parallel ancient Rome and Iron Man's action. It's a great parallel and nicely done with the split screen effects. I feel great compassion with Iron Man who makes tough decisions. I don't know if he is making the right ones, even though he thinks he is doing good. *Frontline* has been a wonderful surprise from Marvel. No ads, and a lot of depth in the overall package.

This is definitely a series that provides different views of the "Civil War," and the combination between the stories does have a nice literary quality. After you put the book down, it forces you to think about war and what it does to people. It makes the other *Civil War* tie-ins stronger, because it makes you re-read some other books like *Amazing Spider-Man*, *Wolverine* or *New Avengers* again trying to discover new views and angles, trying to figure out what's right and wrong. What is good or evil? Philosophical questions which aren't easy to answer. Paul Jenkins is writing this book with great enthusiasm, making the whole *Civil War* saga something not to be missed.

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LINE OF FIRE REVIEWS

DMZ #18

Posted: Tuesday, April 24

By: Martijn Form

Print This Item



"Friendly Fire"

Writer: Brain Wood

Artists: Riccardo Burchielli and Nathan Fox, Jeremy Cox (colors)

Publisher: DC Comics/Vertigo

Plot: A new five part story arc begins.

Comments: Is *DMZ* one of the best comics being published? Absolutely! I can not believe it's already at issue #18 because I still consider this a new title, but that's where I'm wrong. *DMZ* has already presented some astonishing story arcs, especially the last one, "Public Work," which got me on the edge of my seat. This book has truly distinguished itself in the comic industry.

Years ago, Brain Wood wrote and illustrated a book titled *Channel Zero*. If you haven't got that one, pick it up (it was published by Ait*Planet Lar), and while you're at it, order *Public Domain* (a *Channel Zero* design book). Both books give you an idea of where Wood is coming from and where a part of the *DMZ* story started. It's almost unfair that Wood is such a gifted artist and he's probably even a better writer. At this point in his career, he is focusing his writing. But on occasion he still provides some of the art in *DMZ*, and of course, he provides the wonderful covers.

At the first glimpse of Matty Roth, our lead character, I knew this guy is going to be my pal. I like the way Riccardo Burchielli is drawing him. The way he wears his press cap, his beard and most importantly, the emotions in his face. Burchielli knows how to capture the right emotion for the right panel, a gift that shouldn't be dismissed. He must know Matty like family and love him like a brother. The details Riccardo puts into his panels are amazing. He has a great eye for detail.

Similarly, Wood's dialogue is superb, and his captions are spot on and make a scene better. He never overwrites.

When Matty sees his father, it's an important scene, even though it only lasts six small panels. The scene has an impact, despite its short length because of the

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controversy between the two characters. Both the father and the son have issues. To be continued I will say ♦

Matty is interviewing a soldier, who was involved in the "Day 204" massacre. The way Matty is handles the interview is a strong development in his character. He is growing up, and fast. He has seen a lot, and he is becoming a professional journalist instead of an intern. Matty has become a journalist who knows how to dig for a story, but he still has his heart in the right place. I wish we had more like him in our crazy news media world where journalists are driven by their ego and career aspirations rather than a desire to capture a story objectively.

When the soldier tells his story, the issue switches into flashback mode with Nathan Fox handling the art duties. I googled him and he maintains this lovely site, which is in 3D, mind you. So if you don♦t want to get sick like me (haha), put on your 3D goggles; you will love it.

The guy creates some amazing pages for us. The way he portrays the horror and the violence of a war is gruesome. His art style is very expressive, and Fox isn♦t scared of using blood in his panels.

Talking about blood I do have to mention the sublime color pallet of Jeremy Cox. I think he should have been credited on the cover. The first few pages provide the quality we know this book always delivers. Cox brings us some bleak introductory scenes, and then with the flashback, he shifts into overdrive, using brighter, almost psychedelic colors, to let us feel the madness of war.

And then the apotheosis!

"Three month later" is the caption reminding us that the world is grey and Manhattan is bleak. Of course, it♦s raining. There is absolutely no hope in these streets. The soldiers are kids. Exhausted. And then ♦

A brilliant moment for Jeremy Cox. The eyes of the insane. Scarred red from exhaustion, a cold and the bug. The river of blood. The yellow of the flaming mouths of the machine guns.

Man, this book is a rush, and as perfect as a comic can be.

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LINE OF FIRE REVIEWS

New Avengers #30

Posted: Friday, May 11

By: Martijn Form

Print This Item



Writer: Brian Michael Bendis

Artist: Leinil Yu

Publisher: Marvel Comics

My belief is that Bendis is a busy bee and a talented comicbook writer. No buts about that part, but he is overstaying his welcome on *New Avengers*.

When Marvel discontinued the Avengers and came up with the concept of the New Avengers, I was on board. And I think it's time for me to seek out professional help; I'm still reading this ongoing after 30 issues, and I keep asking myself "Why?" because there hasn't been any issue (or storyline even) that I can consider to be magnificent.

The team in this so-called "team book" hasn't functioned as one since the beginning of the series. Yes, there was controversy about which members were picked to become Avengers, but overall, I like the team. However, one of the weakest books in the *Civil War* game was *New Avengers*. It could be so much more. Both sides of the camp were part of the same team, a fact which allows for amazing drama and conflict. But Bendis didn't want to drive in Mark Millar's car.

So why do I buy this title month after month?

Hope.

That's the only thing that can explain it. I hope for better story arcs and more gripping plots and drama.

But after this latest issue, I am seriously considering dropping this title.

When Leinil Yu was drawing *Ultimate Wolverine vs. Hulk*, I thought his art was well suited for the story. He produced some amazing splash pages, but what is he doing in this book? Can somebody explain? Is it Bendis' way of scripting or are the deadlines of a monthly book too much?

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Yu has a nice rough way of drawing, but his panel layouts aren't particularly clear. His composition isn't working for me. Whereas the fighting scenes in *Ultimate Wolverine vs. Hulk* are excellent, the fighting scenes in this issue are all so unclear. The placement of the panels just feels off. It isn't a pleasant read.

I don't understand Bendis' motivation behind this story arc. To call it "Revolution" is a big promise, but it's not living up to that at all. And Dr. Strange casting a "purity spell" to make sure are no traitors in this New Avengers? Lame! Spider-Woman isn't pure of heart. She is a double agent and working for well who isn't she spying for?

This issue was a quick read and can easily be placed into my comic box without re-reading.

The only thing that kept my brain from falling asleep was Bendis' hint of Hawkeye possibly becoming the new Captain America. Will he be called The NEW Captain America? Let's hope not, because Ed Brubaker is better than that.

No, Bendis should let someone else step up to the plate to make *The New Avengers* a homerun again.

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Red Eye, Black Eye

Posted: Wednesday, May 9**By:** Martijn Form**Print This Item**

Writer/Artist: K. Thor Jensen

Publisher: Alternative Comics

[Red Eye, Black Eye](#)

K. Thor Jensen

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Plot: Thor travels 10,000 miles in 60 days, all in those horrible Greyhound buses.

Comments: I can bore you to tears with my story about my trip throughout the USA, but I♦m in an excellent mood today so I will spare you the details.

Let♦s just take this one step at the time ♦ begin at the beginning.

The Cover: The cover displays Thor on a burning couch, pulled by a Greyhound bus. It seems like a simple cover, but it has several elements that can be interpreted as metaphors of what lays ahead in this story.

Book Design: Alternative Comics is a small independent publisher, but kudos to them for their whole package of the book. It♦s done with love. They used good printing paper, and the quality of the cover is nice. They opted for the Manga format, which works really well with the six panel per page placement, but they were smart enough to use superior paper quality than most Mangas.

Story: I♦m a bum for not knowing any work by K. Thor Jensen. *Red Eye, Black Eye* is my first glance at his pencilling.

And what a glance!

When I got this book, I waited till it was bedtime to start reading. My intention was to read a few pages and then off to dreamland.

So much for my plan!

I began reading and didn♦t finish the book until it was why too late for me. Yes, I read all 304 pages in one go! The next morning feeling broke, I took it with me, and let♦s say I read more when I worked.



My initial reaction was to compare it with *Blankets* (TopShelf), but that isn't doing justice to *Red Eye, Black Eye*, because this book can hold its own.

Jensen made sure that this story actually reads like a novel. A graphic novel that is, which he divided into 19 chapters. Each chapter pinpoints a town/city where Thor is travelling to. By doing this, and making New York the beginning and the end, it gives you a realistic feeling of what 10,000 miles feels like.

This voyage Thor is undertaking can be seen as a pilgrimage, a soul searching of what life is about. While reading this tale, I kept thinking of *On The Road* by Jack Kerouac, who also chose New York as a beginning.

Thor is looking for inspiration to get his own life back on track, besides doing this by traveling, he meets a lot of interesting characters. These characters supply him with strange and wonderful anecdotes, which can be read like realistic fairy-tales. The people that Thor meets are almost stranger to him. Most of them he's only met through the internet. This shows braveness on Thor's part: to put his life in the hands of strangers, even though it's for a brief moment.

It's there in Brantleyville that Thor is towed by a truck on a burning coach.

Characters: The characterisation is a strong point of *Red Eye, Black Eye*. This doesn't feel like fiction; these people are actually living somewhere.

The book contains more than twenty individuals who Thor meets throughout his voyage, but by using a clear format of the different chapters, it isn't hard to put yourself in Thor's shoes. These people are like you or me, searching for their (small) place in the universe.

Thor has a gift for extracting highly personal anecdotes for his own sanity. They are a slice of life. Sometimes they have meaning, a beginning and an end, but Jensen is also brave enough to keep stories dangling without any resolution. Almost like real life.

Art: Although the art style of Jensen is limited, it's highly effective. Throughout the book he only needs a few ink lines to draw the right expression for his main character, Thor.

The six panels per page is a strong format. It delivers a steady rhythm like a tight drumbeat in a song.

The panels are genuine without showing off. It keeps this narrative realistic and humble, without losing the grand scope of *Red Eye, Black Eye*. By looking at the drawings I can smell that distinct odour of a Greyhound bus again.

Final Word: *Red Eye, Black Eye* should be regarded as highly as *Tricked* or *Box Office Poison* by Alex Robinson or *Blankets* by Craig Thompson.

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LINE OF FIRE REVIEWS

Secret #4 (of 4)

Posted: Monday, May 14

By: Martijn Form

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Writer: Mike Richardson
Artist: Jason Shawn Alexander

Publisher: [Dark Horse Comics](#)

I wish when I read this book wearing diapers, because I almost had an accident.

This will be a movie someday. No question about it. But before Hollywood messes up this story, do yourself a favour and buy these four issues. Or if you are lazy buy the trade paperback when it's released.

Jason Shawn Alexander is one of my favourite new artists. The man has got soul, and he pours it right into his art. His watercolors don't need any digital touch up. His mixture of colors make this an very eerie read. The black inks creep up your spine. It makes you sweaty and restless, while the climax grows with every page.

I haven't had so much fun reading horror in awhile. Tommy's discovery in the cellar makes *Hostel* seem like a kid's movie. Can sequential art be anymore violent and dark than this? You show me. Although the art is sinister, Alexander makes these characters come to life (or death).

This guy in the raincoat always wearing a hood, can easily be the new Jason Voorhees or Michael Myers. He is twisted, dark and you have no clue who this monster of a man is. Mike Richardson plotted this series very well with an outstanding climax of a story that leaves you gasping for air.

I can't find anything negative to say about this mini series. I **have** to hype this; there is no other way.

Well, maybe I can write one criticism: the series was too short! And since Dark Horse Comics mostly released on schedule, this series was over in four months.

If Dark Horse collects this series into a nice trade full of extra's, I will buy it a second time.

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I'll conclude with this; as soon as you can, schedule a party at your home. At the right time, dim the lights, present *The Secret* and creep out all your guests! Then go to the bathroom and call one of your guests and whisper:

"I know your Secret!"

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LINE OF FIRE REVIEWS

The Escapists #1

Posted: Monday, July 17

By: Martijn Form

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Writer: Brian K. Vaughan
Artists: Philip Bond, Eduardo Barreto

Publisher: Dark Horse

Plot: A young boy discovers his father's comic book collection about The Escapist and decides to bring the hero back to life.

Comments: First of all, let me be frank: I haven't read Michael Chabon's novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, for which he received the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for Best Fiction. But I'm going to. Better late than never, especially after reading the first issue of *The Escapists*. I even didn't read the comic books about the Escapist published by Dark Horse. I am more into Vertigo comics, especially Brian K. Vaughan. When he is writing a book, I'm reading it. This guy can write great plots, creates amazing characters, and his dialogue is excellent. I like him the best when he writes comics for mature readers because then he shows what a great writer he is, and it almost becomes literature. His stories have depth without being pretentious. So I got on board for a nice ride with *The Escapists*, especially when Michael Chabon asserted ♦ Vaughan turned in a script that caused grown men, or at least one grown man, to weep for joy. It is a script that well meets, and perhaps even exceeds, the expectations raised by the shadow of the parent novel ♦"

When I finished *The Escapists* #1, I knew Brain K. Vaughan did it again. He wrote a hell of a good story with so much going on. The first three pages, for instance, present a nice set up for the story and remind you why reading comics is so much fun. It makes you aware what great history comics have from the early 1940 to this millennium. These three pages provide a great perspective of the world of comics and why super heroes are important.

Vaughan only needs half a page to deal with Maxwell's dad's funeral. In a lot of comics it seems the writer expands a one page scene into half the comic in order to make sure the story arc is composed of six issues. Vaughan doesn't need those tricks because a page later we are in the holy of holiest for many comic fans: a

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complete (and I mean *really* complete) merchandise heaven of a super hero.

I don't know if you have ever experienced such a moment, where you get to meet someone, who's got all the goodies of Batman, Superman or Star Wars. It's almost like a religious moment of some sort. When you only have several comics from the Golden age, but someone else has *all* Batman issues in mint condition. I remember when I was like 10 years old and visiting my uncle. He had a separate room where I liked to play and there I found in one of the boxes all these mint condition *Donald Duck* comic books from the fifties. Okay, they were not Superman or Batman, but man, those are the best Donald Duck stories there are. Complete. Every issue published in the 1950s. I secretly read them and somehow he found out and didn't like it at all, so one day they were gone. Now I hope I'm in his will and when he is gone that I'm the owner of the treasure.

Getting back to this first issue, pages six through eight match any Alan Moore story. This scene is drawn by Eduardo Barreto, and he captures the Golden age of comics perfectly. The way the panels are laid out and the old school coloring are extremely fun to look at. But the best part is that the characters' dialogue tell a different story than the panels show. And this is done in such a natural way that it makes the best use of sequential art.

I hope for Dark Horse that all six issues of *The Escapists* will be a great success, because the first issue can easily match a top series like Alan Moore's *The Watchman*. And I hope that Brian K. Vaughan, even though he is moving to Hollywood to get into screenwriting, will continue writing for comics for many years to come, because mark my words, he will be the next Alan Moore. Or is he already?

And for one buck, you'd be a loser not to buy this first issue!

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