

# Hub Magazine

SCIENCE FICTION HORROR FANTASY

**PUBLISHER**  
LEE HARRIS

**MANAGING EDITOR**  
ALASDAIR STUART

**COMMISSIONING EDITOR**  
ELLEN J ALLEN

**DESIGN/LAYOUT**  
PHIL LUNT

**ISSUE 93 • 26TH JUNE 2009**

## CONTENTS:

---

- FICTION:** *Ticket* by J.R. Blackwell
- REVIEW:** *The Magic Mousetrap*  
*Saturn Returns*  
*Doctor Who: Room with a Deja View*
- FEATURE:** *Bleeding Words #5* by Gary McMahon  
*Interview: Stan Sakai - Part 1*



*Hub Magazine is Sponsored by Harper Collins*

## EDITORIAL:

---

by **alasdair stuart**

### *New Minds, Fresh Ideas*

A Buffy reboot and an Alien prequel are the latest additions to the remake band wagon. In the wake of the vast success of the new Star Trek and the two new Batman movies, Hollywood has realised that everything old is new again and as a result, everything has a built in audience. At least in theory.

At first glance they're both disastrous ideas. Buffy and the associated TV shows and comics are widely and justifiably regarded as a pop culture classic and, speaking personally, I'm still very fond of the original movie. After all, what's not to love about 'He ruined my jacket...KILL HIM A LOT!'

Then there's Alien which is tantamount to the Holy Grail of modern science fiction cinema. For the last few decades the vast majority of SF films have riffed on Alien's dirty, lived in, grimy world, where people are more concerned with their next paycheck than contacting other worlds and where no one is more important than the money, the company, the product. To produce a prequel to it seems tantamount to blasphemy, something many people feel the series has already suffered thanks to the Aliens Vs Predator movies.

They're right. They're also wrong.

To say that a remake chokes out any chance of new writing establishing itself is, superficially, true. However, there's also an argument for saying that they provide new talent with a built-in audience, a chance to prove themselves on a safe franchise and then move onto other things. Whether or not they survive the experience, as evidenced by David Fincher's legendarily horrific experience making Alien 3 is of

course a different matter.

It's also worth considering that in at least some cases, a remake or reboot is a significant improvement. The Nolans saved the Batman franchise, grounding it in a very real, very contemporary Gotham. Likewise the Alien prequel is being produced by the Scott brothers, meaning the director of the original film is going to be heavily involved in production and the ongoing success of the Buffy Season 8 comic and Anthony Stewart Head's recent confirmation that he and Whedon are both still keen to do something with Giles means the proposed reboot won't overwrite the established Buffy universe.

Of course, this means nothing. Neither could happen or both could and be abject disasters. But they might not be and I, at least, am looking forward to finding out.



*Hub Magazine is Sponsored by Harper Collins*

# FICTION

---

## Ticket

---

by j.r. blackwell

Orion counted out six stimulant pills in his palm, the inheritance plundered from the pockets of his dead friends. The pills would have to last the week till he got to the drop-point. He would have to conserve, which meant he would have to sleep tonight. Orion slipped the pills back into the plastic container on his belt. Back on Mars everyone believed that superior training and equipment would make winning the war against Earth simple, but Orion had been on the ground for two months and he knew better. Earth people fought dirty.

Martians battled the native Earthers in crumbling buildings and metal towers, dead electrical lines marking the path between ruined cities. Orion's squadron, dropped on Earth two months ago, had been ordered to destroy a village. The mission itself had been easy, but traveling from the burning village to the drop-point had killed everyone but Orion. Earthers used whatever weapons were available, black market rifles, landmines, razor wire, stolen ray guns; they even unearthed toxins to pour in the path of the Martian forces. Their ancient gunpowder weapons left bodies with giant bleeding holes.

Orion slept in old steel towers, spending the whole night half awake in his net, his ray gun across his stomach. Smoky Earth days slipped into hot florescent nights. The stimulant pills made Orion's heart thump against his breastbone, but they had long since stopped clearing the clouds from his mind. Even the nervous anticipation of violence, that fear, faded against exhaustion.

Orion climbed a high oilrig to hang his sleeping net for the night. The rig was one of thousands that dotted the small cities, built to drill through dry earth. Much of Earth technology still ran on oil, but the oil fields had long since gone dry. Fixing his net between the iron bars of the rig, Orion lay and listened, putting his weapon on standby to save battery power. He counted his pills again, tempted, as he always was, to take another. He knew he had to wait; he wouldn't get more till he reached the drop point. Better to save the pills in case the Earthers found him. At the drop point, a silver ship would come and pick him up and take him to a good meal and a soft bed. They might even let him go back to Mars for a while before they shipped him out again.

Orion set his motion alarm and tried to doze off, the stimulant pill from the morning still rocking his chest. He imagined his heart must be bruised from thumping so hard against his breastbone. Orion closed his eyes and tried to relax. His movement alarm squealed loudly in his inner ear. Orion grabbed his ray gun and switched on his night vision, searching for a heat signature. Nothing. Then he saw a heat source

climbing towards him on the rig. Orion powered on his ray gun, six seconds till it would be ready. He shook it, even though he knew that did nothing. The heat signature was ten feet from his position and moving towards him fast. He had three seconds till full charge. Two. One. Orion pulled the trigger. There was a thud and the heat signature cooled on the ground. The fear was back. Orion lay awake the rest of the night. The long hours to dawn had nothing but silence, no more heat, no more movement.

In the morning, Orion climbed down the rig and landed on top of a small body. The face was turned, the smooth skin splattered with blood. It was a child, still gripping a submission ticket. Martian forces scattered the white submission tickets over Earther settlements, encouraging civilians to surrender to Martian soldiers. The kid had come to surrender and Orion had shot him in the face. Blood and bits of bone were matted in his hair. His small feet were covered with plastic bags. Orion took another stimulant to get through the day, all thoughts of conservation gone. His heart pounded hard against its bone cage.



## The Magic Mousetrap

reviewed by guy adams



Written by Matthew Sweet

Produced by Big Finish

[www.bigfinish.com](http://www.bigfinish.com)

rrp £14.99

### **2 Across - A candied writer of gospels perhaps? (7, 5)**

Writers review with a slightly different agenda (actors too). Sometimes you read (or listen, or watch) someone's work and find yourself taking it to pieces, maybe even explaining to one's friends and family how you would do it differently (right up until they tape your mouth shut for being such a terrible bore). Sometimes you come up against work that you wouldn't begin to pick at, work that creates two

distinct (and one would imagine *opposing*) reactions in you. I have this latter response to Matthew Sweet: I want to embrace him and then smack him out of pure jealousy.

This is the second of Sweet's Doctor Who dramas. His previous, *The Year of the Pig*, was richly detailed, filled with dialogue that oozed into your ears leaving you as bloated as it's titular swine. No criticism, I swallowed every mouthful. This is more lean but his damned dialogue still sparkles and his concepts intrigue. He is quite, quite hateful.

### **6 Down - A patch of land with a story to tell? (4)**

The action takes place in an exclusive sanatorium run by Viennese alienist Ludovic Comfort. His patients: chess grandmaster Swapnil Khan (played beautifully by Nadim Sawalha), music hall star Harry Randall and "darling of the Weimar cabaret scene", Lola Luna. In a cable car, Khan's daughter, Queenie Glasscock is on her way to visit. Her traveling companion appears to be a small, scottish amnesiac but is of course nothing of the sort. Now, if only the Doctor can avoid the electro-shock treatments maybe he can remember what's going on and save the day. Or will Ace and Hex manage to stop him?

### **24 Across - Groin cane in a mess? (9)**

To have the seventh Doctor so lacking in knowledge is refreshing, it's down to his companions to play games this time, pulling the rug from beneath his feet and ours as they fight to keep everyone in the dark. Comedy and eeriness (always a favourite combination) play out hand in hand as we build towards the big revelations Sweet has in store and it is to his further credit that, even when we know what's going on, things maintain their intrigue right through to the conclusion.

### **31 Down - New Year's Eve on the continent for the genuine article. (9, 5)**

Sylvester McCoy divides opinion as the seventh Doctor. There are those who love him and those that don't. For myself I am rarely less than impressed by his bravery of performance, he is always on the lookout for something new and unexpected, sometimes that catches him out, more often it delivers something great. Here he is certainly on excellent form and it is a play that couldn't have feature any other incarnation of the Doctor.

### **36 Across - Oration with fruit on the tongue (4, 2, 5)**

Philip Olivier does a posh accent. Seriously. Surely that alone is worth the price of admission?

### **40 Down - Brucie loved giving one when the cards were played right (5)**

If all of the above wasn't enough -- and it should be, *The Magic Mousetrap* is nothing short of

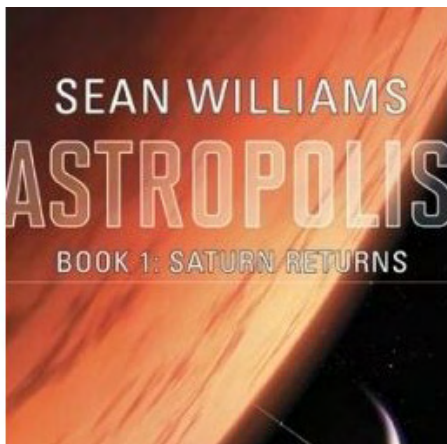
excellence -- you get the first part of another ongoing story, Marc Platt's *The Three Companions* featuring Polly, The Brigadier and Thomas Brewster. This story will unfold over twelve, ten-minute episodes all tagged on to the regular releases.

#### **49 Across - A belief in everything as fact? (8)**

Frankly if they get any more generous Exec Producer Nick Briggs will be coming around to subscribers houses offering to do the washing up. Save him the ignominy and buy this CD.

## ***Astropolis Book 1: Saturn Returns***

*reviewed by mark chitty*



Written by Sean Williams

Published by Orbit

rrp £7.99

The Slow Wave has hit the galaxy and has wrecked the Continuum in its wake. The Forts are no more and the line is in chaos as information travelling along it is trawled to find information on this disaster. What was once a united galaxy is now in turmoil as individual systems take control for themselves, resulting in more fighting for power.

When the Jinc find pieces of debris from a large artefact on the edge of the galaxy they painstakingly gather all of them together to reveal a drum, one with a back-up of Imre Bergamasc contained inside as data. After they re-create his body and mind using all this data, Imre awakens 150,000 years after his last memories, in a brand new body, unfortunately of the wrong sex, and a patchy memory. Although the Jinc try and reassure him it could be due to the recreation of the drum, he has other thoughts and wants answers.

A former mercenary for the corps, Imre remembers his team and plans on finding them. After escaping the Jinc with the help of a mysterious object and the key phrase 'luminous', he heads for the familiar: the Mandala Supersystem. On entering this system he sees first hand how the Slow Wave has affected the galaxy; no united front and a nagging feeling that he shouldn't just go straight to the first planet he comes across.

We follow Imre on a journey to reclaim his past life, to uncover the memories he is convinced are buried and to find out what exactly the Slow Wave is and who is behind it.

Firstly, I enjoyed Saturn Returns quite a lot. It's a widescreen space opera with elements of military sci-fi thrown in, which is almost always a good combination. As the first part of projected trilogy (plus one short story) it does everything that it needs to do: the story, universe and characters are set up nicely and good descriptions are used to portray the technology in use. Also, plenty of questions are raised (and some answered) that make Saturn Returns a novel that is difficult to put down.

The characters we meet are all unique and each have their own motivations within the main narrative. Although this may sound like it can get messy, it doesn't. All of the former corps members are given enough depth and personality to bring them to life and behave in a way that is both believable and interesting. Constant questions are raised about alliances and the history between them, but it just fits together nicely. As the story revolves around Imre and his journey we spend a lot of time seeing things from his perspective, flashbacks that reveal a little at a time and events that make the pages just turn quicker. We also know only what he does, so there is always the questioning and guessing, trying to put the puzzle together.

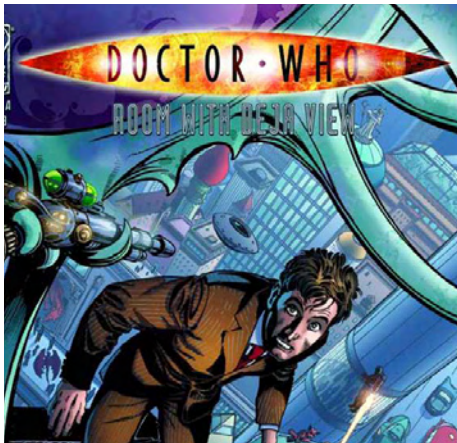
One of the better aspects of the novel was the time span involved in the galactic history. With the technology to make time pass quicker or slower than Absolute (normal time), hundreds of years can pass in mere days, or days can last hundreds of years. This brings up interesting questions about how this time difference affects the population, but is dealt with convincingly and effectively. There is also the fact that

many characters have clones of themselves that run around the galaxy and occasionally the memories are combined when this happens. This is looked upon as an extension of that person, not a separate entity, which is a strange view to understand. Although it's justified in the story, it's a subject that I wasn't entirely convinced about.

All in all, *Saturn Returns* is a great Space Opera novel that has set up the sequel very effectively. With characters and a universe that I look forward to revisiting, *Saturn Returns* has set the bar high for the sequel – I'm just hoping if the story will continue in such a great way. Highly recommended.

## ***Doctor Who: Room with a Deja View***

*reviewed by alasdair stuart*



Written by Rich Johnson  
Art by Eric J  
Colours by Kris Carter  
Letters by Neil Uyutake  
Edited by Denton J. Tipton  
Published by IDW

The Doctor is the last of his species. The Doctor is a Lonely God, moving through time and space at will. The Doctor and his people are spoken of in myth and legend. The Doctor is *bored*. So when the TARDIS picks up a distress signal, he jumps at the chance to do something a little more exciting than bee bop meditation and throws himself into the curious case of TX. TX is a member of the Counter family, a species who live their lives in the opposite temporal direction to everyone else. TX is guilty of murder and TX has met the Doctor before...

Johnston has a keen ear for the 10<sup>th</sup> Doctor's dialogue and moods and that anchors what is arguably the most innovative Doctor Who comic to date as the Doctor tries to work out how to talk to a creature who already knows what questions he's going to ask. There's almost no action here, just a very clever, very compassionate man trying to solve a near impossible problem and the end result isn't just one of the best Doctor Who comics published to date, it's smart, innovative science fiction that could only be done as a comic.

This is driven home by the way the conversation between the Doctor and TX is presented. As he swaps places with the Doctor at the end of the conversation, the panel border (Or gutter) colour shifts from red, signifying time moving forwards, to blue, signifying time moving backwards. Read in one direction, the conversation makes no sense but read in the other, starting at the end and working backwards, it's equal parts chilling and uplifting. It's a very simple, almost elegant piece of storytelling and the implications of TX's life and actions are cleverly implied but never overtly stated, giving it surprising emotional weight. Living life backwards means you have a very different perspective on death and TX is arguably one of the most *alien* aliens the Doctor has met for a long time.

Eric J's art and Kris Carter's colours are more than up to the task of presenting this complex story as well as the wiry energy of the 10<sup>th</sup> Doctor. Similarly, the motley collection of aliens the Doctor encounters, freed from the constraints of the TV budget, look great, an odd combination of Basil Wolverton and *Dan Dare*-esque designs that give the story a welcome dash of pulp. Likewise, Neil Uyutake's lettering presents a complex, dialogue-driven story simply and accessibly, helping the reader rather than getting in their way.

A unique story with an innovative twist, an eye for detail and one of the best, and most obtuse *Morecambe and Wise* jokes in years, *A Room with a Deja View* is one of the best *Doctor Who* comics produced to date. If you're even remotely a fan, you need this.

# FEATURES

## Bleeding Words

### ***Bleeding Words #5: Stories Lost and Found***

*by gary mcMahon*

I have this memory – or is it a dream? I do that a lot: have dreams that I recall as memories, convinced that they actually happened. It gets a bit confusing at times, but no real harm is done. At the worst, it gifts me some wonderful memories of the things I never did (hang on; there's a story in there somewhere. Hands off – I thought of it first!).

Anyway. Let's get back to this memory.

I remember as a boy writing short verses of bad poetry or brief prose sketches on ragged sheets of narrow-lined foolscap paper, taking each individual sheet and wrapping it around a stone, which I would then throw into the river. I have no idea why I might have done such a thing, except that maybe I had some vague and juvenile concept of "found art", or was providing literary nourishment for the scabby flatfish that populated the River Wear.

Then there's the story of Jack White, from the rather good band The White Stripes. Apparently he used to work for a furniture company before he was famous, labouring for hours a day over chairs and sofas, either covering or stuffing them (I'm not sure which). The story goes that he would write little songs and stories and sew them up inside these chairs and sofas, hiding them away like small gifts of art. I like that. I like it a lot. The idea of some fat corn-fed American sitting drinking beer and watching the World Series on top of Jack White's early song lyrics amuses me.

The point I think I'm trying to make is that we can draw parallels with these two stories regarding the internet. Blogging and publishing on websites is rather like wrapping your words around stones and chucking them in the river, or stitching them up inside a recliner chair. They hang at the surface for a couple of second and then sink to the bottom, where they sit and gather silt. Furthermore, the same could also be said of modern small press publishing. Due to the ease and popularity of PoD publishing coupled with the fact that so few people actually buy and read genre books anyway, we can all be seen as small boys (and girls) throwing our stories into the river of literature, where they will quite probably just sink and be forgotten.

It's a nice image, but also rather a sad one. So many books being sent out there for so few readers to get hold of. And the future of publishing looks even gloomier: ebooks, Kindles, Sony Readers. In theory it makes the material so much easier to get hold of, but I suspect the reality will be that nobody cares about the small-circulation books published by independent houses. At least now we have the collector's market, a bunch of book lovers who buy beautiful editions of novels by writers they've perhaps never even heard of just because they're bound in the foreskins of aardvarks or the hides of Australian jumping mice. It often seems to me that these collectors keep the independent press going.

But what happens when real books stop being printed? The collectors will have no new books to buy so will roam the internet looking for old copies of books they missed out on the first time round and the electronic versions (oh, how I hate that phrase) of newer stuff will be ignored.

And all the time that kid keeps throwing his stories into the river, each one becoming more obscure and less likely to be found. Soon there will be no stones left; and no stories to wrap them in...

Or am I wrong? Will self-publishing in fact be the future of books, with each author selling limited book editions of their ebooks through their personal websites? I've already seen small examples of this, with authors selling their personal copies of out-of-print titles on a first-come-first-served basis. Perhaps the extension of this practice will be that the author arranges himself for a paperback (or flashy hardback) edition to be produced and punts it on his own, leaving the publisher to distribute the electronic version (oh, God, now I've used it twice!).

It's an interesting thought. Just one of the many that keeps me awake at night when I would much rather be dreaming new memories.

29<sup>th</sup> May 2009



## Interview: Stan Sakai - Part 1

with richard whittaker

Stan Sakai's world is a simple place with a simple order to life.

"Lizards are lizards, birds are birds, and rabbits are people," he explained to a crowd gathered earlier this year at the STAPLE! Indie Media Expo in Austin, TX. Sakai's world is the world of *Usagi Yojimbo*, the comicbook tale of a samurai rabbit on a warrior's pilgrimage across a fantastical version of 17<sup>th</sup> century Japan. The latest volume, *Bridge of Tears*, has just been released through Dark Horse comics, and marks the 25 anniversary of one of the longest-running indie comics ever.

The roots of Usagi are as simple and clear as Sakai's own art. Growing up in Hawaii, he watched imported Japanese Samurai movies in the local cinema. In 1982, he first drew a bunny with his ears drawn up in a topknot. He took the *Yojimbo* from Akira Kurosawa's 1961 ronin classic of the name, added usagi (the Japanese word for rabbit) and voila.

But Sakai has never treated the story as a silly wabbit tale. His work, he explained, is built around one maxim: "Lack of research will kill a story, no matter how good it is." *Usagi* is immersed in Japanese culture and myth. Just as the eponymous hero was inspired by the tale of Miyamoto Musashi, the 17<sup>th</sup> century kensei or sword-saint, the series' heroine, Ame Tomoe, is a mixture of the 12<sup>th</sup> century warrior-nun Tomoe Gozen and a rice candy Sakai loved as a child, tomoe ame ("The kanji characters are different, to avoid lawsuits," he added.) That's why *A Kite Story* from #20 is one of his favorite stories: He got to research the culture and construction of the giant Odako kites. That's why he took five years to research the myth-shrouded sword Kusanagi no Tsurugi: To make sure he gets everything accurate. "The research inspires me," he said. It pays off: The resultant story, *Grasscutter*, earned him his 1996 Eisner for Best Serialized Story.

But it wasn't Usagi that started his career. The rabbit was going to be a back-up character in his first major strip, *The Adventures of Nilson Groundthumper and Hermy*, which ran back in 1983 in *Albedo Anthropomorphics* #1. The first Usagi story didn't appear until the second issue, which Sakai admitted "they could barely give away." There was no market for comics aimed at a mature reader that weren't either stoner comedy or porn, and especially nothing in black-and-white. Then a little comic called *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* came out and "the black-and-white boom was on," he said.

One big plus? Suddenly *Albedo* #2 was going for \$200.

As one of the big names of this new movement, he inevitably ran into *TMNT* creators Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird. In fact, he sought them out, sending them a sketch of Usagi, and they reprinted it, "and that really upset me," he joked. "If I had known they were going to do that, I would have done a much better job." That lead to a professional and personal relationship has lasted to this day, with *Usagi/TMNT* crossovers that continue to this day.



But his strongest and longest working relationship remains with his oldest collaborator: Sergio Aragones, the creator of *Groo the Wanderer*. Lettering for the comic title was his first professional gig in comics, and he admits that their relationship has had a big impact on his work, "particularly my drawing ... through many years of constant mockery, I've learned to draw faster." Aragones is, he said, "One of the ten most fascinating people I have ever met. It's because of him that I've learned to work on the road."

Even after 25 years at the summit of indie comics, with an Eisner actually signed by Will Eisner, Sakai is grateful for everyone that asks for his signature. One guest at the expo, with mild embarrassment in his voice, asked Sakai if he could sign some of his *Usagi* collections. Sakai told him, just leave them by the booth and he'll get to them as he could. In fact, he drew a different sketch of a different character in every single volume, and thanked the collector for his loyal support.

In some ways, that's some of the fanboy coming out in Sakai, since he remains astonished that he gets to meet the artists that have influenced him so much from all cultures. "Getting to travel is one of the neat blessings of what I do, and" he added, "not only do I get to travel, but people pay my way."

*Usagi* has become an international sensation, with one odd exception. Although the tales of the sword-wielding bunny is available in 12 different languages, it has never been translated into Japanese. In part, Sakai said, that's down to the format. Even though his stories combine two mainstays of manga (anthropomorphized animals and bushido culture), Sakai makes it clear that he's a comic artist. The difference, he said, "is very hard to describe, but you know it when you see it." His quick explanation? Manga takes 20 pages to show someone lifting a coffee cup, but in a western comic, that's two panels. Panel one, cup up. Panel two, cup down.

Any disappointment about the lack of mainstream success in Japan is outweighed by one fan : Osamu Tezuka, "The God of Manga" and creator of *Astro Boy* and *The Big X*, who flew Sakai and his family out to Japan and was an impeccable host, "To this day, we have no idea why they invited us over," he said humbly.

Tezuka isn't the only industry giant to call him. As a child, Sakai bought *Fantastic Four #2* (it was, he admitted, a matter of economics: DC had just put its prices up to 12 cents, but Marvel was still charging a dime a comic) and immediately became a fan of Stan Lee's work. Decades later, Lee hired him as the letterer for his *The Amazing Spiderman* Sunday newspaper strip "He just called up out of the blue ... he's just like he's portrayed, that's the way he is. He's an outgoing, exuberant guy," he said. When they finally met, Sakai had to admit that his son was also a huge fan (not because Lee helped invent modern comics, but because he was the voice-over guy for *Iron Man*, his favorite cartoon show). So Lee sent over a huge box of signed merchandise, including a back-pack that Sakai's son wore every day for three years. "He's 17, but it's still hanging on his wall," Sakai noted. Since then, Stan the Man has returned the favor: These days there's a photo of Lee and Sakai's daughter in Lee's office, next to the photo of Lee and Ronald Reagan.

Even after 25 years, there's still no end in sight either for Sakai or *Usagi*. He and Aragones have started working with artist Tom Yeates to bring together Dark Horse Comics' biggest barbarian franchises in *Groo Meets Conan* (with *Groo Meets Tarzan* also in the stack). Before either sword-swinging crossover, there will be a 60-page water-color graphic novel entitled *Usagi Yojimbo: Yokai* (yokai being a Japanese spirit or demon), due for release in October. Like the origin of *Usagi* himself, it came from a simple sketch ("I just drew a couple of picture of zombies in samurai armor and I loved that," he said.) Beyond that, he'll be going back to his roots with new adventures for Nilson Groundthumper and Hermy, but his ultimate ambition is to draw the final battle between *Usagi* and his arch-nemesis, Lord Hikaji. Only there's a slight complication. He's considering dropping a *War of the Worlds* prequel in the mix, with Martian scouts taking on ninjas, plus steam-powered gundams. And, of course, there is always space for more research and more historically-inspired characters. The next may be his biggest challenge: Wong Fei Hung, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Chinese doctor and revolutionary that inspired Jackie Chan's character in the martial arts comedy *Drunken Master*. Yet again, the historic accuracy drives Sakai. "At that time, Japan was closed to foreigners, so I

have to work out how to get him in.”

**Next Issue:** Stan Sakai sits down for a Q&A about how he met Sergio Aragones, the solitary nature of being a comic book artist, and the importance of keeping your intellectual property.



*Hub Magazine is Sponsored by Harper Collins*