

USA Today Covers Sunset

Written by Betsy Gonia

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Now that San Diego Comic Con is behind us, it's time to pick up your copies of our SDCC exclusives including the graphic novel *Sunset*! But you don't have to take our word for it.

Take the word of USA Today writer Brian Truitt. Check out his coverage of *Sunset* in the rest of this article, or go to the official posting [here](#).

You will probably look at the gnarled old guy at the grocery store a little different after reading Christos Gage's *Sunset*.

The writer's original graphic novel — the first for Top Cow's Minotaur Press imprint — stars Nick Bellamy, an old-school former soldier and hitman who's decades past his heyday. However, his old Mob boss is fixing to take him out 30 years after Nick ripped him off, and after a loved one is murdered. His estranged ex-wife and son could be next on the kill list, so Nick sets out for some old-fashioned justice.

Gage was pondering a 1950s-set *The Darkness* story set in Las Vegas, but then began thinking about what would Sam Spade or Mike Hammer be like today if they were still around and working cases?

Thus, "geezer noir" was born.

"In our society, we tend to devalue old people — like, oh, you passed a certain age, you're obviously not good for anything anymore. Just marking time until you die," Gage says. "And more and more people are showing that's not the case. I wanted to take that to the extreme."

As much as he was inspired by Clint Eastwood — "He's 80 years old. I still wouldn't mess with him," says Gage, mentioning a strong *Unforgiven* influence — he also was fascinated by reports about people "who are ages we'd consider one foot in the grave" doing extraordinary things, such as a pole vaulter in their 70s, World War II veterans fighting off muggers or a female gymnast still owning the pommel horse at 86.

"I can't do that. I couldn't have done that when I was 19," Gage says.

Instead of color, *Sunset* utilizes black-and-white tones to tap into the different eras explored — including Vegas in the '60s, when "it was more of a Mob-run town as opposed to a corporate

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town," Gage says — as well as add a stark quality to Nick's strong and silent facade.

"He's got this craggy face and you see his life written in the lines of his face, and black and white makes that so much more powerful," the writer says. He credits artist Jorge Lucas for giving him all the facial expressions that stand in for a lot of talking: "He was never going to have interior monologues. I don't think he overanalyzes what he does all that much."

In Nick's story, Gage also harks back a little to his very first comic-book work, a DC Comics miniseries starring the hitman Deadshot as he finds out he has a daughter and something to live for.

"Sometimes family ties like that can be a weakness, but they can also be a strength," he says. "This is probably my first time ever quoting Sarah Palin but the 'mama grizzly' aspect, as it were."

Nick also finds a strange kinship with the old Mob boss, another man from an older time who's an outright hostile racist, according to Gage. "They hate each other and they're mortal enemies, but at the same time it's like, 'Here's probably one of the only other people on Earth who understands me.' That's an interesting and fun layer between to explain."

But even before Nick and his loved ones are marked for revenge, Gage alludes to the fact that, every so often, Nick would walk through a bad neighborhood and tempt local punks à la "Dirty Harry" Callahan to see if they felt lucky.

"It really isn't realistic that someone who's this much of a tough guy would have an idyllic white-picket-fence life even before his old boss comes after him," Gage explains.

"I'm 40 years old and I'm already at the point where I'm like, OK, in my day we had one joystick and one button and I didn't hear anyone complaining. I'm kind of turning into a crotchety old man, and it's interesting to think about what someone from the '50s and that era would think of things like texting and the current generation."

For those of you who enjoy more officially worded information, check out our copy of the press release [here](#) . Regardless of the level of formality you like to receive new information, don't forget to pick up your copy of Sunset now at [the Top Cow Store](#) or at your local comic shop!