

Interview with David Hine

Written by Betsy Gonia

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Writer for **The Darkness**, David Hine, was interviewed recently by [Bloody Disgusting](#).

You can read the interview below.

Bloody Disgusting: The Darkness was given a clean slate starting with issue #101. How refreshing was it to sort of have a blank slate to work with when coming onto the book?

Hine: It's the ideal way to enter a long-running series. The character and background story is well established but there is no obligation to stick to the detail of what has happened before. I'm able to cherry-pick the aspects of the book that I like while re-inventing the concept along new lines. "Rebirth" was very clever in that way. All these late 20th Century characters in the Top Cow Universe can be re-examined and re-presented to a new generation of readers without losing any of the core aspects of the characters that made them unique.

BD: Did you feel any pressure coming onto the book given it has a very loyal dedicated following of readers and you have essentially 100 issues of continuity that have come before it? Or were you more interested in coming in to shake things up?

Hine: Yes and no. I am aware of the fan base and I do feel an obligation not to betray their loyalty, but I'm sure most of them will be happy to go along with the changes we're making. You can't keep recycling the same ideas and scenarios. Everyone who came on board to write the book before me had to do a certain amount of surgery on the books to keep them fresh. We've just done it in a more concerted way. But we're not going to make changes just for the sake of it. I have my own perspective on the character of Jackie Estacado and the way he relates to the Darkness. There are aspects of the whole concept of a human being relating to this dark power that comes from within that I want to push to the limit. It's more to do with the inner psychology of the character than the physical stuff. Jeremy Haun and myself are coming at this book from a different angle that is less about the Armor and the Darklings and large-scale combat, than it is about the insidious effects of evil on the mind. We're not losing sight of the fact that the readers want cool horror visuals though. The great thing about the Darkness is that you can manipulate it visually. It manifests as an interpretation of the mind of whoever is controlling it, so we're seeing horrific and visually stunning representations of the psychosis that is overwhelming Jackie and everyone around him. In fact the entire Top Cow Universe is becoming warped by what is going on inside the heads of Jackie, Jenny, Hope and the dark forces Jackie has set free. In other words, we have the dark psychological horror and we also still have impressive

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fucked-up Darkness scenes – lots of visceral horror to illustrate the madness.

BD: Despite being issue #101 of the series when you started, your run on the book has been fairly reader friendly for new audiences. Was it your intent to make something accessible to bring new readers on board? How do you do that without alienating old readers?

Hine: It was very important to make this a good jumping-on point for new readers and it's important to me that anyone should be able to pick things up at the beginning of each arc by simply reading the one-page synopsis at the beginning of each issue. That's not to say we don't have some complex issues being addressed and some long-term character development, but I think most readers would find they can jump on and enjoy the book straight away. Talking to new readers I've found that most of them have said that they had no problem starting in fresh, but have been intrigued enough to start picking up the previous issues, which is just the response I would have hoped for. I haven't heard from any long-term readers feeling alienated. The thing is that we have never tried to erase anything that happened before. It's all still there in the past, but the Top Cow Universe came to a fork in the road and took a different direction. That affected the past so that certain events have changed. There are two alternative versions of the past and in our version there's still an echo effect from the previous universe and that is actually incorporated into the plot.

BD: So far the book has really examined the psychological horror and examining the dark side of Jackie's mind. What was so appealing about that aspect of his character for you as a writer?

Hine: I don't believe in heroes and villains per se. Absolute good and evil don't exist in the real world and are boring when they're depicted in fiction. I've always found it far more appealing to find the seed of decency in the heart of a wicked person or the corruption in heroic characters. Jackie is a very wicked person. As a hitman he killed without compunction and when he found he was the bearer of the Darkness he became comics' ultimate anti-hero. What kept him interesting were the chinks in his armor. Jenny Romano – good, innocent, beautiful Jenny, his childhood sweetheart – was the focus of the decent side to Jackie. Killing her off early in the original series made Jackie an even more bitterly twisted character but it also made him less empathic. After her death there was a sense that the character was drifting, searching for some focus to his existence. With Rebirth we were able to give him that focus: the family he always wanted.

BD: At the core of the book is the somewhat toxic relationship between Jackie and his wife Jenny Romano, as well as his daughter. How is that propelling the book and Jackie?

Hine: This is what is making the book exciting to write. Once I had given Jackie everything he wanted it became obvious to me that there had to be a price to pay. It's a modern version of Faust's pact with the Devil. Jackie has restored life to someone who was fated to die, but in return he is losing his soul and his sanity. He wanted perfection and for a brief moment it seemed as though happiness was within his grasp, but within a couple of pages of the first issue I wrote, the relationship starts to turn bad. I don't want to give away too much of this, because the psychological disintegration of Jenny and the slow corruption of Hope is indeed what propels the story and the readers are going to have to stay with it to see how it plays out.

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The final resolution to that aspect of the story will take place about a year from now, so it is a slow-burning plot line. Along the way we're also introducing the idea of ancient forces that once walked the Earth, reappearing through the flaws and fractures in Jackie's new Universe and that's where the action picks up the pace. It's a Lovecraftian theme that seems to have found its way into several of my recent projects, and also into many other recent fictions across popular culture. Comics, movies, novels, all seem to be experiencing a regeneration of the Lovecraft mythology that underlies all modern horror – the idea that there is an ultimate evil that is totally amoral and exists only to feed on the psychic energy of humanity's collective psychosis. "Whom the Ancient Ones would consume, they first make mad."

BD: It seems like Jackie got exactly what he always wanted, which was his wife and daughter, but he is struggling to ride the line between mobster and family man...

Hine: It was immediately clear to me that Jenny would have to tolerate Jackie's lifestyle to some extent but that she would want an absolute separation of his gangland activities and his home life. That's why I named the Estacado estate after Samuel Butler's Utopian land, which of course, turned out to be anything but idyllic. Erewhon is an anagram of Nowhere. The inference is, of course, that perfection is impossible. Utopia doesn't and cannot exist.

The solution to Jackie's problem was in some ways obvious. He separated himself completely from the Darkness, literally stripping away his evil side. The unintended consequence of that was to create an evil double known as the Doppelganger. Jackie is Dr Jekyll to the Doppelganger's Mr Hyde. Freed from the burden of the Darkness, Jackie should have felt liberated, but instead he feels that something has been taken from him. He feels incomplete and ironically Jenny has found herself less attracted to him. Whether he likes it or not, she fell in love with the bad boy Jackie, and it's starting to look like the Doppelganger is taking possession of Jackie's life a piece at a time.

BD: What can you tell us about the "Breaking Dark" storyline and where it will take Jackie?

Hine: As the title implies, we are taking Jackie all the way down to the bottom with this arc of the story. I want to see how much I can take away from him before he breaks, and when he does, what will happen to him? I know the answer to that of course, because we have the following arc outlined. I think we'll manage to surprise our readers again with some of the twists in this arc just as we did with the first one.

BD: Jeremy Haun has been turning out some of the best work of his career in my opinion. What has it been like working with him so far and do you have to gear your writing towards his style at all?

Hine: We worked together on the Arkham Asylum book at DC before this, so I already knew that this was going to be a good collaboration. I always write a little differently for an artist that I know personally. It's more conversational. The great thing is that I know that Jeremy will deliver what I need from each of the characters. I don't have to agonize over it. Jeremy gets the interior stuff instinctively, so the characters are acting from the inside out. The longer we work together the better it gets. Jeremy is also great at getting to the core of the story and has helped to guide

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the direction of the book every time we've met up to discuss it. Those face-to-face meetings are invaluable. This weekend at New York we were chatting and once again he came up with a suggestion that will provide one of the key moments of next year's new arc. Whenever Jeremy says, "What if Jackie..." I start taking notes.

BD: Give your elevator pitch for anyone that has not yet had the chance or given the Darkness a shot. What can they expect and why should they pick it up?

Hine: We took the darkest book on the stands and made it darker. We took one of the most conflicted characters in comics and seriously fucked with his head. Everything and everyone that Jackie touches eventually becomes corrupt. The Darkness is a disease without a cure, and it's going viral.

In addition to the interview on Bloody Disgusting, you can read **The Darkness** #101 for free! Check out the article

[here](#)

and scroll to the bottom to find the free reader!