

An Interview with Pat Mills

Conducted by Skype, 28 July 2016

Julia Round

Pat Mills is well known as writer, editor and creator of many British comics.

Interviewer: Julia Round

Respondent: Patrick Mills

Interview Run time: 116 minutes.

Key:

PM – Pat Mills

JR – Julia Round

[Distortion] – Sound quality is too low to hear words

[] – Sound quality is low and words may not be correct

Time Stamp

1:02 PM

So, if you like I'll start with Question 1...!

1:02 JR

Yeah, we should definitely start at the beginning. So I found a couple of starting points for you online and I wasn't sure which was true, you know where you sort of began, so yeah talk me through it...

1:11 PM

OK, well yeah I started at DC Thomson [distortion] and as, a sort of assistant editor there, and ah, then I went freelance, I went freelance with John Wagner and really we wrote for a whole spectrum of comics. Including *Lion*, including a lot of humorous comics, that more pertinently, writing for *Tammy* and also *Sandy*. Now, that's the bit that sometimes got eclipsed because the comic revolution if you like, started with *Tammy* and Gerry Finley-Day. Because *Tammy* was very very different and you know it's possible sometimes to feel that *Tammy* today, you know back issues to depending on, especially if you go right back to the very beginning, and you'll see that some of the stories are way way over the top by

comparison with later on. My, the famous one "Slaves of War-Orphan Farm", but they were really tapping into something that *Bunty* had not achieved. And that is really why I say that the comics revolution started then. There were also some wretched stories as well and that's almost inevitable. So, John and I came into girls comics that way. Because Gerry and his boss John Purdy I think recognised we were moving away from traditional comics Gerry was and we were looking for something new and fresh and I think in our early days I'm not sure either us really achieved any stories of any great merit, for all sorts of reasons that probably fall outside this conversation. But, I think everyone recognised that John and I were part of that new movement and of course at the same time, just to put it in context, there was Malcolm Shaw who had a similar background from DC Thomson, that's the key really, that you know, youngish people from DC Thomson had a different outlook to the regime and IPC and arguably even within DC Thomson themselves and so that's the kind of energy that was pouring into girls comics in the early 70s.

4:09 JR

OK, when you say that *Tammy* was doing something that *Girl* and *Bunty* hadn't done, I mean obviously they both looked a lot different from what was there before I think, you only have to put them next to *Girl* and the kind of bigger broadsheet, what did *Tammy* do? Is it just this kind tortured over the top story or is it kind of more dramatic?

4:26 PM

I think there was a lot going on with *Tammy*, an awful lot, *Bunty*... *Bunty* had great phases but if you look at *Bunty* generally you would go through, you know you might get a 6 month run of brilliant stories and then 6 months later it's just no different to *Mandy* or the other ones...what is it? *Diane*? And *Diana* and so on. But *Tammy* was consistently trying for something new and different so I joined *Tammy* on the editorial side after a couple of years and I think one story in particular defines how different *Tammy* was to anything that has gone before, and I would say that even, not only...I think it's even now ahead of its time, and that particular story is one called "Ella on Easy Street". Where it applies that rare logic that you would see in "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner" where a working class kid says "SCREW THIS, screw this!" and "you know, I'm not going in for your race", you know in the "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner" and that's a brilliant moment, that film could not be made today. So, the assumption of "everything is always onwards and upwards" is really challenged by the "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner". No one could make that today and a similar way "Ella on Easy Street", beautiful artwork by an artist called Canovas, for years I was calling him Casanovas which is quite awful but I believe it's Canovas, and he has passed now but I mean he was a brilliant artist, and with "Ella on Easy Street", her parents are yuppies, I think her cousin or someone who, or some other female rival is a yuppie as well. And she feels that

what is the point of getting on in life? Isn't it better to have a quality of family life rather than, you know, [distortion] night school, endlessly holding down two jobs, bettering yourself, etc. etc. Now however that might creak a little bit when you look at it today, the ethic behind that is really revolutionary. And, you know it's such a departure from the, what you might call the... I don't know where would you start? The broader stories, I mean this is psychological, this is weird psychology, and it was one of a number of weird psychological stories that came in at that time. And then the other thing that was also pretty fantastic was the occult stories. Now the occult stories had a very specific logic that I don't think *Bunty* had and I think *Misty* also fumbled the ball on this from time to time. But certainly not on my watch if you like. That was that they chose to bring in modern elements of the occult, so that, you know, so there might be something, I don't know...some modern artefact that was haunted. In other words getting away from, you know, gothic horror into a hard 70s world. I'm trying to think of some examples of that, the one example that comes to mind is my own story "Glenda's Glossy Pages", which was far from perfect but the idea behind it is quite traditional and yet very modern because the heroine, Glenda, has this mail order catalogue and dreams of changing her poverty stricken life and having riches, and she finds that whatever she rings round in this mail order catalogue mysteriously arrives. And there's nothing to pay! And that kind of mail order catalogue thing, you know, if one was doing it today I suppose we would probably make it Amazon...

9:05 JR: Yes, that would work just as well, it happens all over *Misty*...there is haunted cameras, there's stories that sort of juxtapose the past and present, like obviously the serials like "The Nine Lives of Nicola" and "Cult of the Cat". But yeah I totally see it in points like that.

9:17 PM

Yeah and that was new for *Tammy*. So *Misty* if you like, you can see, perhaps the best of *Misty* because I, I do think that *Misty* got some things very right but it could have been so much better. And I think the psychological stuff was one direction that things could have really gone places. And to a degree it did in a limited way. And then the other thing was these example [distortion] and so on. You know things that readers can identify with so they don't feel that the stories are old fashioned. And that all originally, to a large extent from Gerry, with myself and Malcolm Shaw, and others picking up on Gerry's vision.

10:11 JR

Yeah, that's fantastic. I suppose that does sort of lead me into my second question anyway because it's, it's something that *Spellbound* perhaps doesn't necessarily do. *Spellbound* is much more sort of, you know there's the space sort of serials, it's all kind of fantasy, quite far removed. But, how closely does *Misty*

link with "Spellbound"? Because you mentioned you guys obviously came from DC to well...

10:33 PM

Well now it's funny 'cos I saw this come up on Facebook the other day. What year did *Spellbound* come out?

10:42 JR

'76-'77, so it ran for 69 issues, and it started I think in the summer of '76 or thereabouts.

10:49 PM

Right. So that was actually slightly ahead of *Misty* am I right?

10:54 JR

Yeah, it was.

10:57 PM

Yeah now I mean, I have no recollection of *Spellbound* so I am assuming that the reason for that is that we never really [encountered this]. So I can remember having a conversation with John Sanders the publisher, and you know the one I ran down with the copy of, that blurb I sent you?

11:19 JR

Yes, yes.

11:19 PM

And I don't recall us even discussing "Spellbound". And I'm pretty... in other words [distortion] I know it sounds rather arrogant, but I think by the time we had done [distortion] we had really trumped DC Thomson. And I think history bears that out. I mean to begin with there was quite fierce rivalry between the two of us, because there were key guys at DC Thomson and we were all if you like "Right, we are going to show these guys" and all that kind of stuff. So I think by the time by the time *Spellbound* had arrived I think our sales which were so far ahead and not just on the boys comics side: *Battle Action*, *2000AD*, but obviously on *Tammy*, which was a huge seller, and *Sandy* for a while, although, there were things wrong with *Sandy* and *Pink*, another one that was around. So yeah I think

that's the background of those two particular ones, yeah.

12:31 JR

Yeah, I mean I suppose when you look back at it now, they seem very close together. But I mean they are a year and a half or so apart at least. And it is a kind of atmosphere where horror is sort of turning up on TV and all over the place. And as you kind of said, you know *Spellbound* lasted half the run of *Misty* which is, which may just be to do with how DC Thomson sales were doing at the time particularly I guess.

12:56 PM

Yeah, yeah I mean they, the editor on the boys side, I met him about 3 years ago and he said how, well, the gist of what he was saying was, that they were quite frustrated and they couldn't go as far as I could. That they were hedged in by the restrictions at DC Thomson and I think he was more or less saying that, you know, if he had been given a free hand he really, well, he would have given me a good run for my money kind of thing! [distortion]

13:31 JR

Yeah I mean when you look at it, it is a lot more traditionalist depiction of everything really. So kind of moving onto the different types of stories you mentioned...which I have always found really interesting, particularly the "What's in the Box?" story, which runs fantastically. I suppose what I was wondering is, were these kind of specific to the different comic titles that were out or were they kind of a more general template that was sort of tweaked for each work?

13:59 PM

No it was, it was again part of that vision that started off with Gerry, and, I mean, although later on I think, you know, I think he, well off the record I think he lost his way. But I think initially he was a strong visionary and, and although he is probably about the same age as me, maybe a few months older...I think I very much saw him as a mentor. And, one of the reasons for that is because when *Tammy* came out in conjunction with John Purdy, John Purdy was, had a background of also DC Thomson but he had a background of some kind of creative writing correspondence course, there were a lot of those around at the time, and he really understood the rules, which I think took me a decade or so more to actually, you know fully absorb. And so when *Tammy* came out they did a lot of reader research and some of that is pertinent and, and you start to get a sense of formula or, I always love using the word formula because it annoys some of my peers! A more polite word would be principles of storytelling but OK! One of the things that came out that was interesting was one particular story bombed with the readers and that was "My Father, My Enemy", in *Tammy*.

15:39 JR

OK.

15:39 PM

And the reason it bombed, in simplistic terms was no-one reading, a girl reading those stories does not want to think ill of her dad. Right? So it could be a step-dad, it could be a cruel uncle, it could be whatever you like, but it cannot be DAD, because that's getting a little bit too close to home, do you know what I mean? So, if some poor reader actually does have a brutal dad, you know, that's too painful. And I had a similar experience when I wrote a story with a negative image of a mother figure, of a mother in *Pink*. So, when we talk about formula, some of it comes from actually studying reader feedback. That's part of it.

16:30 JR

So how is that [reader feedback] done? Because I've noticed obviously *Misty* keeps having the coupons, was it literally [from reader voting] or are we talking like independent surveys or? Do you know?

16:39 PM

In the case of *Tammy* I'm pretty, in fact I am certain it was, there were occasionally independent surveys, they may well have hired outside people to do them, they certainly did later in the case of the boy's comic. I know that one quite well, because there was this sense you see, as the '70s went on and got into the '80s circulations were dropping, even amongst the most successful comics like *2000AD* and I think that's ultimately why they sold the whole group to Maxwell. Because they, they couldn't see how to stop that decline and they weren't prepared to do the thing that would of made all the difference which was to give all of us involved a slice of the action. In other words, a slice of the profits, and suddenly the quality of the stories would have gone up immensely. But, to come back to the formula, that's one of the ways that the formula arose, because we were actually studying and analysing what the readers were saying. The other thing was, when we had key writers who applied certain styles and principles of storytelling and they got it write it was endlessly repeated. And a classic example of that, which is very very interesting is "Little Miss Nothing" which I think ran in *Tammy* and was Pat Davidson [*this was in fact written by Alan Davidson*], and I described her perhaps a little over the top as the Alan Moore of girl's comics. That might be a little bit, well I think it's just to emphasise how important she was, she made a difference to sales and in that sense she was the equivalent. And so, her husband Alan Davidson... yeah is that right? Pat Davidson/Alan Davidson? Yeah! He, he was writing them and then we all were, everyone was writing these formula stories which in very simplistic terms were, it was a Cinderella story of, a

modern day Cinderella. And if you think about it if one were to do a modern day Cinderella today, you know bringing in social services and God knows what else, I'm sure it would still be incredibly popular, because it presses this primal nerve in the readers psyche. And, to answer that other part of your question about, OK, was it a universal thing? No, it was restricted to a group of us who I think actually were, if I say we were a bit snobby about it, it suggests we were arrogant, and in a sense we were probably seen that way. But it was like we understood the Holy Grail, we got it! And we didn't want it to be corrupted or lost or diminished, and if you look elsewhere, outside that kind of clique of *Tammy*, *Pink* and even *Pink* had separate problems but then that was still there, and aspects of *Misty*. If you look outside that you will see rather different stories emerging and the sales of those publications wouldn't be as good. They still have certain things going for them, *Jinty* for example, had science fiction stories, but it still in my view had strong elements of traditional story telling. And that's why nostalgia collectors often like *Jinty* because it's like a hark back to, you know the editor in question Mavis Miller had done a great job of adapting, now off the record, well i don't know if it's important I suppose you can use it, off the record Norman Worker, and actually we should come onto him because he is a crucial part of *Misty*, he didn't adapt, he did not adapt, he was still very much looking back into the past. Now I don't know who it was who in this same era as *Misty* and *Tammy* and everything put together any, but I think I may have been ranting about that in that article I sent you?

21:09 JR

Yes.

21:10 PM

I mean, OK, I'll spare you a rant just now! But, so it wasn't a thing across the board, the concept of formula or principles of storytelling, was poorly understood by people outside our narrow group. And that's why loads of us who did understand those principles like myself, John Wagner, Gerry and so on, we went off and applied those principles to boy's comics often inappropriately, as in the case of mysteries, which I discovered to my horror. "Ah, right, OK I'm going to do a mysteries story here" and then discovering that the male readers didn't give a shit! You know it's like "ARGH!!" But at least we were aware and we cared I think that's the thing that we were looking at stories and saying "Why does this story work?" and I often say this, I'm sure you have probably come across me saying this, that a lot of our success, well all right I will speak for myself, was because we actually looked at what readers liked. And you know I'm sure there could have been more talented writers than myself who, if they had taken the trouble to look at what readers want rather than what they want to write, they could of been way ahead of me. And if you like, it's my good fortune that I actually you know, started from a different perspective, "OK, what's working?" and "How can I provide that?", and then as a kind of subversive extra "How can I, you know, get in my

own subversive subtext?"

22:55 JR

Yes, it's interesting that you mention fairy tales, like Cinderella and so on when you are talking about that because that is kind of what they remind me of in many ways. So this isn't true of all of them but they are, a lot of them seem very kind of plot driven rather than character driven, so they are not kind of great investigations into you know, a kind of lead character psyche. But they are kind of situations with mysteries and lessons and so on attached which makes them more I suppose, timeless and fairy-tale like to me.

23:25 PM

Yeah I think there is that and I think one of the reasons why and I'm probably being a little bit hard on us all here, but this is something you can sort of say when you have been going [laughter] [distortion], you can start criticising yourself! One of the reasons why they may have been plot driven and therefore principles of storytelling applies rather than, if you like, individual characterization, would have been in my view because none of us would have particularly known or had grown up kids, I say grown up kids- kids of that age, so wouldn't be in a position to have characterized girls. And bear in mind it was mostly us chaps who were writing this stuff with the notable exception of Pat Davidson. So, we only had a relatively hazy idea of what would be going on in a girl's life. But by staying on the tramlines of formula we were OK. Now I think I offer as evidence of "there's something in what I'm saying" flash forward to *Girl* comic where I wrote "9 to 4", now I wrote "Nines", and I think what happened there is kind of telling and kind of relevant to *Misty* because I believe *Girl* came out after *Misty* and Norman Worker was the script editor of *Girl* after, yeah after *Misty* I believe, and so the story I wrote for him was "9 to 4" and it's pure *Grange Hill*. Photo-strip, pretty insipid photography but of course you are using 11 year old girls who just have to actually act as they would normally, but my source material was my twin daughters. So what would happen is, I would pay them to describe to me what happened that day at school! And, and so they would be saying "so and so was doing this that and the other" and "Oh God that bitch!" and all this kind of stuff, so I'd be writing all this down, and paying them I hasten to add! And, and so basically although it does have its flaws as so many girl's comics have because the condensed pacing of these things, they don't give us room to breathe like manga, but that aside it was phenomenally popular and as I expected it to be because a) it was based on *Grange Hill* and b) it was based on my own kids and of course it was authentic. So girls are reading this and they are thinking "oh yeah that's just like my mate, or this is just like my day at school". And Norman Worker said tellingly to me, he said "I don't understand why this is so popular", he said "all the girls do", he said "is sit around..."

26:43 JR

And slag each other off?

26:43 PM

Yeah! Bitching about each other! And I said "Well Norman, from my experience as a dad that's actually what they do talk all day!" Because it's that sort of age and I was fascinated by it. And yeah, so if you like, when my kids had reached a suitable age I could actually explore their psychology. But you know, when they were about 7 or 8 or something like that it just wouldn't have been appropriate and it wouldn't have had the necessary sophistication if you like. And I think, that probably went for all of us, I think the more we could, it's one of those golden rules of creative writing, write about what you know about. Now you can't always do that because, you know, a lot of writers we don't get out much! So, when you can't get out or when you haven't got kids or you haven't got a neighbour you know to pick their brains, then the alternative is to stick closely to the principles. And I think that's sometimes why the dialogue is not actually that fresh or sharp. Because I mean what do we know?!

28:18 PM

I think there are probably some exceptions but off the top of my head no. And again this is probably a story you aren't aware of but do stop me if you know this story. As we got credits on boy's comics and therefore there was pressure on the girl's comics to have credits. And Wilf Prigmore who was the, you know if you like the co-creator of *Misty* as you know the story of how I backed off from the whole thing. He would come down regularly to Colchester to see me and talk about *Misty* and so forth and one of the things he told me to my horror, he said, and why he would tell a freelancer in retrospect is pretty naive, especially someone like me, but anyway he said "Pat Davidson and Alan Davidson they have come to me and they have said that they would like credits on their stories and they feel that their work should be acknowledged." and he said that they said to him that they if they didn't get those by-lines they would off and work for Dutch *Tina* and Wilf said, well he said to me, "well, I had to face them down and say you have just got to go", and he said "because if I gave into them on that, then you know, everybody would be after things", in other words a mark of being a strong editor is not to give in. Well, I won't, you know, you can imagine my reaction to that Julia, so I won't go into a rant. But what a loss, what a terrible loss, it's the Alan Moore thing again, they tried holding onto Alan in a very clumsy way, failed, and the same thing happened with Pat and Alan. I mean, what happened after Dutch *Tina* I don't know. So to come back to *Misty* no they were not writing for *Misty* and that said I might be doing Pat a disservice here but I suspect she was really the Queen of Cinderella stories, I'm not so sure that she was the master of mystery stories and supernatural stories. In fact, I would probably go further and say I think all of us were struggling a little bit once we stepped outside Stephen King and there is one guy who I think was very good and I've mentioned him I believe in that article, Bill Harrington who was an actor and that's why his

dialogue is very smooth. But he was again a little traditional, but he had a, I think he had some skills that he picked up from working on the stage or whatever, but I don't any of us really sort of, came to fruition there with the possible exception of Malcolm and I think Malcolm, and by the way I'm not sure if he was the editor of *Misty*, I think he was vice...I could be wrong but...I think he was freelancing because he went off to Spain and then sadly died a year or so on from that. But, I think Malcolm, I'd say that, I think Gerry could write good mystery stories but progressively lost it, I think I could write good mystery stories and did for *Tammy*. I think when it came to *Misty* I probably did several good one shot stories and maybe a couple of serials but I, I think by then my interest was moving towards boy's comics, I would of liked to have wrote more mystery stories but I think Malcolm had that commitment in my mind to girl's mystery stories perhaps, perhaps a little more so than myself. Because he wasn't a [distortion] on *2000AD*.

28:04 JR

It is interesting though, I mean I'll jump forward to a later question then, so did Pat Davidson write for *Misty* at all? I mean, were there any female writers working on it or was it literally just the group of guys we kind of know about? [distortion] Right so he was much more invested in that. I'm going to go and talk with Brenda Ellis in a couple of week's times so I'll be sure to kind of ask her.

32:58 PM

Yeah, I think she would be very interested to talk to you, yeah.

33:03 JR

Yeah she got in touch with me, which is great. So yeah thank you for that as well because I think she got my details from you.

33:09 PM

Yeah, I gave them to her. I'm thrilled with, of how she got in touch with me now, as you know for years everything has just been, you know, no one really knew what had happened to you know, Malcolm and family and so on so that was great to know

33:30 JR

Yeah, no she is close by she is down in Taunton, so she is not far from me at all.

33:34 PM

Oh that's cool.

33:35 JR

Yeah she has got some stuff that she wants to donate to our library, which is going to be even better. So yeah that's a really good thing. OK so, I mean we have got you and we have got Malcolm and obviously a few other people working on it, who kind of who did what? And whose idea was the *Misty* character? How did this sort of come about? Because she is kind of, yeah I wonder where she sort of comes from.

34:05 PM

[distortion] Am I sounding OK by the way? My voice is echoing a bit at this end? Is that OK your end?

34:12 JR

Yeah it's a bit echoey but it's fine.

34:17 PM

Ok, I would have preferred *Misty* to be a little more, a little older, I wasn't personally keen on the idea of a fictional [distortion] like that. I would have preferred the cover sort of been like one that [distortion] there is a cover of, a cover taken from the story "Roots" where the girl is looking out through the glass with absolute horror at something we can't see. I would have preferred that approach so the credit for the character of *Misty* comes from Wilf Prigmore and I think he should have done, mind you it's a dreamingly, even though dare I say it a little old school, I mean I know she [distortion] kind of character, but even so, I prefer something with a bit more harder edge and [distortion] and I think that if I had edited *Misty* exclusively, I think it would have been a more [distortion] comic. And, I like to think that if it had still been around today [distortion]

35:48 JR

Definitely one way or the other! [distortion.....] She's a New Age of Aquarius style sort of witch. Would you not have had a fictional editor at all then? Because obviously that worked pretty well on *2000AD*, is that just not something that would have...?

36:09 PM

I [distortion] with some colleagues, the fictional editor of *2000AD* and within one year I regretted it. It was being a little, yeah I think I realised in retrospect that it was a bit young and a little under-sophisticated, and I, some 5 years after

2000AD had started I was at a convention and said about getting rid of Tharg and there was huge cheer from the audience, and there was a petition to get rid of Tharg! So, yeah and I offer in evidence of that that even "Private Eye" has got [distortion] 'cos it's seen as, I don't know as time has gone for that kind of thing. Now that said to be fair to Wilf and so that if *Misty* worked well, she is this beautiful witch like character and I'm sure it would of had an appeal to a lot of readers and being a little cynical about it I would say possibly the more middle class kids, or middle class mum would see it as "safe" whereas if they see the kind of covers I had in mind they might of said "Oh no, I don't want my Daisy reading this kind of nonsense!". You know?

37:30 JR

Yeah

37:33 PM

So yeah I mean it's a little middle class, a little safe but I am, you know I'm perhaps being unfair.

37:39 JR

Well the reader, I mean the one thing that comes across, I mean I have just finished doing a load of work on the letter pages and the readers love *Misty*. I mean almost all the letters are to do with, well not all, but a significant chunk are to do with *Misty* herself. You know, and some of them are talking about stories and so on but, so much of it is "*Misty*, you must tell us more about yourself". You know, "where do you live?", "what to do you do?" you know, "what star sign are you?", "how old are you?" all this sort of stuff.

38:06 PM

And I think that underlines one of the weaknesses of the comic which is something that I must take some responsibility for because I overlooked this, but OK to be fair to myself I wasn't the sole creator, I was never in any advisory editor role towards the end, but a point that has come up is that *Misty* didn't have ongoing stories, it didn't have characters like Bella for instance, there was no what you might call mystery equivalent to *Judge Dredd*, a character that would be in the comic all the time or indeed several characters who indeed could be in the comic all the time. If you look at *Tammy* for example there is Bella, there's "Wee Sue" which is around for a long time, there's another character "No Tears for Polly" a kind of upstairs, downstairs Downton Abbey saga. So, I think we missed a trick there on *Misty* and I think the fact that the readers respond so strongly to the, to this *Misty* character really brings out how there is a longing for, well they want to know more about her. And really, something should have been

done about that, and if you look at the, one of the reasons for the decline of *Misty* was they went for too many one-shot stories and that's actually shame on them because that, I know having been a you know, an editor, a writer, and all the rest of it, I know that that's an easy way out. Because to sit down and create a serial, especially in those days where our knowledge of the principles of storytelling were still quite imperfect, you know we were still making our mistakes on the page, so therefore it's quite an easy thing to do to say to the writers "Ok let's have a one-shot story". Now, I initiated those one-shot stories but I didn't see them as a substitute for strong serial storytelling. So, if for example we had more "Moon Child", more "Sentinels" stories, more "Four Faces of Eve" – four faces? Five faces? I can't remember...

40:28 JR

Four faces, yes.

40:30 PM

Yeah, you know there, on occasion I will be looking through *Misty* and seeing this brilliant artwork with these one-shot stories but there were too many of them!

40:41 JR

Yeah you are right actually, sorry I'm just looking at my notes and I've got some notes from sampling every 10th issue and it does start off with "on average about 4 or 5 serials, and a couple of one-shots 2 or 3". It kinda goes the other way by the '60s and '70s when you only have a couple of serials and quite a lot of one-shots. And it evens out again towards the end, with like 3 serials and 3 one-shots basically.

41:02 PM

In fact I can't condemn that hard enough, it's pure laziness and I know what stylists would like, and I know, you know, it's so much easier to just have a pile of one off stories. And it's not like you know, stories like EC comics, you know where you had the storyteller or whatever it was, the old witch, the old crone telling these stories. You know, they did have a darkness about them, but if you are going to base a comic on, one shot stories, my God there is a lot of pressure on you. You know what I mean, you have got to, got to be absolutely chilling to compel the reader to come back next week and buy more. So if you have the old wishy-washy story about a haunted coach in the 17th century or 18th century, it's not really going to compel you to come back next week and buy the next issue of *Misty*.

42:01 JR

Yes that's true, and the past stories they do make up a chunk of it, about 12% or something of the output is those ones that are set in a random historical sort of time, or whatever. And...

42:14 PM

I was actually quite angry, I remember at the time. And I mean even as I'm thinking about it now...

42:19 JR

Getting angry!

42:19 PM

What actually rues your anger and I remember being quite angry at the time, thinking "this is not what I wanted, this isn't my vision" of the thing you know. People should not just be looking at Stephen King, looking at *Flowers in the Attic* and all those other novels that are out there, in other words I accept they're templates and one of the things that often frustrated me when I created [distortion] was how, the people who followed in my footsteps would look for the easy way rather than say "OK, well the reason Pat's done that Stephen King story is because there is a principle here that we can follow up on" so it would have been a natural thing for example to have other Stephen King stories and had a hotel, or a giant werewolf or things happen. That would be the natural thing to do. They didn't want to [distortion] because it requires a commitment, you've got to sit down, you have to read a 400 page novel, in the case of *The Shining* or whatever it is, you've got to analyse it and then you can say [distortion]"can I make this acceptable for 11-12 year old girls?". It's just so much easier to come out with all this historical crap. It's so bad, so yeah do quote me on that!

43:51 JR

I will quote that: "pure laziness" I have here!

43:54 PM

It is pure laziness, because you have got to bear in mind the structure of this at the time Julia that, you see in my case and in the case of Malcolm Shaw, we are both freelancers so to a certain extent we are only as good as our last story. And you get into the feedback from the readers through the voting charts bit, so we had to be good! But if you are a staff member [distortion] their jobs are incredibly secure in those days because the union was very strong, the National Union of Journalists all that kind of thing, and so some of them were waiting for their

redundancy, it didn't matter. And, if they had to create a comic for a new serial or something like that it probably meant that it was encroaching on their own freelance time. Now, I'm not saying that specifically but this is a general ambience that you could probably have confirmed by anybody else who is still around from those days. What we had was a lot of people who were staff and 2 or 3 o'clock in the afternoon they would put their office work to one side and freelance some of the publications. And this was going on endlessly! You know, it was, no wonder the juveniles died, everyone took readers for granted but as freelancers we couldn't afford to. And I'd like to think from an idealist point of view I wouldn't want to anyway. I mean why would I want to do something that, where I don't care about the readers and I don't enjoy what I'm doing? But for a lot of them out there, their attitude was "How much money can we make?", "How can we knock it out?", it was a very unhealthy atmosphere and that's why, those of us who weren't like that, you know, I endlessly bang on about how brilliant Malcolm was because as you will discover from talking to his widow I'm sure she will say something to the same effect. And Malcolm really cared about what he was doing, passionate about it.

46:13 JR

Yeah and it comes across I think in the work. You know, I love "The Sentinels" I think it's fantastic. So *Misty* had a sort of collection of staff writers, I suppose it gets me onto, who did what? In terms of do you have any memories of sort of how many writers were working there? Because you have put me in touch with David which is fantastic and he's got a great list of artists but I'm finding it really hard to find writers.

46:38 PM

The writer's side is tough. "Cult of the Cat", and I think "Black Widow", I'm pretty certain were written by Bill Harrington, I'm pretty certain. Now Bill was getting on a bit in my day so I'm sure he would of, or be very elderly now or have passed. He, he was the actor and he had a background of working on *Look and Learn*, in other words he was freelancing for educational magazines. But, he had that ability to change now, so there was Malcolm Shaw, myself and do you know I'm struggling beyond the three of us to think who else was, was there on the writing side. Now, in theory they should have used Gerry but I suspect they didn't. Gerry had very few friends inside the industry, there was a lot of hostility towards Gerry for various reasons that probably don't really come into it. But I'm pretty certain he was not used on *Misty* and they could have used him because if you look for example on some of the classic mystery stories in *Tammy* some of them are written by Gerry and they had some interesting ideas behind them. One of them for example is based on "The Prisoner" and that's "Camp on Candy Island" and another, just trying to think...oh yeah one he gave me and I ballsed it up, it's called [Rays Town] [distortion] which was *Arsenic and Old Lace* where it was a seaside resort where these grannies [distortion] poodle around the town. I mean

it sounds a bit dated now. But the other thing that we also had, I'm not sure...it should have gone into *Misty* and I think it did, because again and I don't think the boys quite understood it, Malcolm understood it. There was what's often called a slave story and this is where girls are gathered together in a group and they're used in some negative way often with a mystery involved in it.

49:21 JR

"Nightmare Academy" probably falls into that category.

49:25 PM

What?

49:24 JR

"Nightmare Academy", which is a school run by a sort of vampire headmistress and there is also "School of the Lost" where you have a sacrificial kitchen maid who goes to work there.

49:39 PM

That sounds good. Yeah! Bear in mind my knowledge of *Misty* after the first, I don't know, the first 6 months or so, for me it was like, well I have carried out my function on it, which is to act as Advisory Editor. Got paid some sort of daily or week to do that and moved on. So yeah, so some of the stories you are describing are quite new to me. And, "Nightmare Academy" sounds fine, I mean if you think of some of these vampire stories that are around today, it sounds could well be suitable.

50:21 JR

Yeah there is a good one actually, I don't have any details for it but in terms of the writer's names, the only other name I've got is Alan Davidson writing "Paint it Black". And a few of the other serials, and that is literally it for names. I've got you, I've got Alan and I've got Malcolm Shaw.

51:05 PM

Alan Davidson by the way, I believe that Pat and Alan Davidson are still around somewhere but I couldn't tell you where. There is this guy called Paul Gravett you probably know of. He, I endlessly mentioning Pat and Alan to Paul, and I may just may track them down, I don't know.

51:31 JR

Fantastic, but yeah I will try and tap him up. But yeah, Gerry's name doesn't appear on here at all I don't think, no it's never kind of popped up. And yeah, it seems likely that he may have kind of been writing. Do you know who wrote those inside cover greetings? Would that have been Wilf? Would that have been one of the editors?

51:54 PM

I will say those, those opening greetings, speech if you like, I'm pretty certain that's Wilf. I mean my take on things, and I may have missed a trick on that is that Wilf Prigmore was if you like the first editor working, working with me. But you see he was also managing editor so he wouldn't of stayed as editor for long. He would of passed the job on and the job would have been passed on to Norman Worker. And Norman, Norman was old school, Norman has been editor of *Sally* which was before my time. Now *Sally* featured things like ["Pat's New Creation"], now you can imagine my views on that story. And I'm pretty certain that Norman must have had something to do with [*Minny*], you know, because Norman was more comfortable with those kind of stories so even though he went on to be script editor on *Girl* and I know he was editor on *Misty* because, how do I know that? Because my ex-wife Angela is an artist and she was working on the *Misty* annuals which featured text stories and she was doing the illustrations for them and she actually did the horoscopes for *Misty*, you know the half page images. Yeah that was a little gig I got her just as she was starting out as a freelance artist. And I can remember that there was a scene, I don't know whether this is relevant to anything it's just my recollection of Norman.

53:50 JR

Well it's definitely interesting she did the horoscopes, it's all that extra content that you don't really know where it comes from.

53:54 PM

Yeah, no no her name now is actual Kincade.

54:00 JR

Did she do the writing or was it just the images? Or....?

54:04 PM

No, just the images. I have no idea who would have done the words on that. There was kind of a stylised but sort of female orientated horoscope images I guess. So yeah, that was down to her and I remember she did some black and

white illustrations for the text stories because she wasn't quite ready to go in for comic strips yet so it was sort of a half-way house and I remember Norman objecting to one of her images where a mother was, if you like, this girl looked a bit possessed, not exorcist exactly but screaming or something and the mother was holding her down and trying to comfort her and Norman said "Oh, I don't know that could look a bit dubious, it could look a bit lesbian" or something. I mean "For fuck's sake! What planet are you on?" that's one of the things that all of us on girls comics, I think, I think it was quite healthy that it never occurred to any of us to look at things in the way that everything today....I mean my God!

55:21 JR

It comes across in the art of *Misty* as well actually because one of the things that sets it apart from DC Thomson's *Spellbound* is that *Spellbound* had some very sexy artists kind of drawing for it and a lot of the girl characters are really, sort of, you know, overdone in these typical "tits and arse" kind of poses and it's just you know, it's just not there in *Misty* which I think....

55:41 PM

That's the whole Spanish artists thing, and I mean, that's, because, although that said as you will probably already be aware certainly through David, who is a lovely guy and he is also a real expert on all this stuff. One of the reasons if he hasn't already told you is something you do with the exchange rate with the pound against the peseta and what that meant was that Spanish artists were very hungry to work for these downmarket comics. And some of these guys, some of these Spanish artists are now world famous, I mean they are guys on *Romeo* like [Esther VanRotto]. And another one on *Romeo* which has some of oblique relevance to all this was an artist called I think Zelli and he did a very innocent series for *Romeo* called *Sandy*, great character and so on but he is also well known for drawing soft porn! As so many Italian comic book artists are you know! And so you know, I think there was a lot of that, some of these Spanish guys or whatever, probably DC Thomson would be buying them up because it's very much a DC Thomson thing, if you can get artwork really cheap from abroad, and often the British artists were getting, were getting pushed out. And although it sounds outside your brief perhaps it is worth adding to this that certainly on *Romeo* that the, I'm being a little patronising here but I don't know how else to put it, working class or ordinary girls shall we say reading these stories they wanted that dreamy, far away *Mills and Boon* quality, they didn't want kitchen sink. And when you got British artists with the more kitchen sink approach the stories bombed.

57:54 JR

It's not what people wanted.

57:58 PM

Sadly, sadly the case.

58:01 JR

Do you remember anything else? Is there any other artists you particularly recollect from *Misty*? Or do you know the studios they came from? Or how they were found? Or was it just this sort of smash and grab approach to getting it?

58:11 PM

I think, yeah, again I'm sure David will know who the artist was. The artist on "Roots" now that has Spanish artist written all over her. And I suspect it was a female artist, I think generally when they would be a Spanish or Italian female artist, but I suspect mainly Spanish.

58:44 JR

I have...

58:46 PM

Yeah you get that slightly porn quality that perhaps, I say porn soft porn whatever, you know, the sort of emphasis and sexuality coming into it, which perhaps came through on *Spellbound*. But yeah, so I wouldn't know the name of that guy, what would happen was there were 3 or 4 studios, there was Studio Gioletti in Italy, that's G-i-o-something like double ll-i- double tt-i and there is an artist also called Gioletti and he ran that studio. Now he would have been supplying boy's comics but probably girl's comics as well. Another key agency was Barrnald Art [*Bardon Art*] another one was Temple Art and there would have been other agencies, in other words they would act as the go betweens. For example Carlos Ezquerra the co-creator of *Dredd* and Dave Gibbons, the co-creator of *Watchmen* they were both on the books of Barrnald [*Bardon*] in London. And Barrnald stood for Barry Coker and presumably Donald someone or other! [*it actually amalgamates Barcelona and London* – JR] So these guys they had a good, you know knowledge of Spanish and so on, so they would go out to Spain, Barcelona and I think, oh there's another name that comes to mind - if you think he is still around but that's the guy... [Jesus] Redondo, now if you see any stories in *Misty* by Redondo, I think he is still around.

60:33 JR

Oh really, I do have, he is on my list for drawing a few. So Ok I will try and track

him down.

60:37 PM

Yeah if you see, I met, I don't want to check my computer just now in case it crashes or something! But he may just be Facebook friends with me. So do remind me of that and I will check. He worked a lot on *2000AD* and I would say his artwork was, he was a very good artist but he's not a great artist. I would describe a great artist as say someone like John Armstrong on *Misty* and of course, that, doubtless you know his name already, Brian Delaney on "Four Faces of Eve". I think it was Capaldi on...

61:28 JR

On "The Sentinels" wasn't it?

61:29 PM

Yeah I think so. Yeah, now he was probably Italian and he may or may or not have come through Studio Gioletti. It was unusual for these guys to have been approached direct.

61:42 JR

Ok, it would all be mediated.

61:43 PM

Yeah, there would be, yeah there was kind of a whole strata, in fact I don't think artists could generally approach comics direct, they had to go through an agent. It's as bad as television or....today it's all rubbish! It's just jobs for the boys frankly.

62:02 JR

Yeah middle ground. Yeah I mean the artists I've got down for "Roots" is a female artist actually, It's Maria Barrera who did a few covers and a few of the serials so she is one of the few female names that I sort have got in front of me...

62:13 PM

And I'm so pleased about that. Because, yeah the characters are beautiful, but it's not, there's nothing that makes you feel uncomfortable about it you know what I mean? And that's quite possibly because it is by a female artist. That's so good.

It's good to know.

62:30 JR

Yeah it's interesting to know. What, what can you tell me about the kind of scripting process that you saw and went through for *Misty*, I've seen one of Malcolm's scripts as I said online which is very sort of panel by panel, were they kind of, were they the standard approach for British girls comics? And you?

62:45 PM

Oh yeah, now, yeah. The approach, I think, with us writers who are well established we might even, it might even be as little as we might say to an editor in the, in the text or maybe a paragraph "I've come up with this idea for a story, it will be like Stephen King's *Carrie*..." and we would leave it at that. I think what bears this memory of mine out is when I did a story for *Jinty* I very unusually wrote a full outline and I remember distinctly Mavis Miller looking at me in horror! She said "What's this?" and I said "It's an outline for the story?!!" and she said "Oh...Thank God, I thought you had written it as a text story at first!", so that gives you an idea of how little we would actually put onto paper. Which means we must of all of us been trusted. I think that it's quite likely it would have applied pretty much across the board, in other words, editors really didn't want to read long outlines. These days they do! So there is for and against that. OK so you have just got this idea in your head and often you would develop it as you went along, you would have a pretty rough idea of where it was going to go, but one of the things about that approach, now I know this was before the script but bear with me, what it meant was that you could, the story might take off and move in a slightly different direction and it was probably wouldn't have applied to *Misty* but certainly it applied elsewhere, where an editor might say "Hey this story is really going great guys, can you spin it out a bit longer?". For them to develop, "the readers love such and such a character can we have more or them?" that sort of thing went on. But Ok to come back to the nuts and bolts here, the way I script today and have throughout my career was the way I scripted back then. In other words, you, with one exception that, what would happen back then I think generally was, we would say Ok, the story is, let's say believe on average 28 pictures, you can double check this with comics but I believe it would come out somewhere around this. For girl's comics the traditional way was 28 pictures over 3 pages, that's pretty, that's pretty condensed, that's quite squashed. And I think it's a tribute to all of us that we could pack so much in, into that space. But of course it does make things look a bit overly-tied. So one of the first things I did on *Misty* was to spread that out more. Now, there is a downside to that which, you know, this thing I'm ranting about people taking the piss and that of course can happen, because some people instead of being paid let's say for a 3 page spread with 28 pictures you are being paid for a 4 or even 5 page story with 28 pictures and you gotta have some creative integrity and not see that as an opportunity to say "Hey, I can really bang them out now!". And I'm afraid on

occasion that would have happened, hopefully not on *Misty* but if you are looking at any particular story and you are thinking "God, this is going on a bit" or you know....

66:55 JR

Now I know why.

66:55 PM

That, that's, that would be the explanation. Now what these days, the only real difference between then and now, and I think I believe I'm the pioneer of this and there may be some writers who do it the traditional way, is I actually write every page, in other words I say "page 1 will have 4 pictures on it or 5 pictures on it, and then page 2 will have so many pictures on it and so on". And the advantage of that is that it means that each page almost has a punchline so in other words, it's rather like a scene on television, every scene adds to the totality of the thing. So it's not a continuous narrative so each page, you know, leads up to a punchline. Not in any self-conscious way but you don't leave it in a kind of in-between state. Now, previously when it was say 28 pages of, sorry 28 pictures and 4 pages or 5 pages as the case may be, I believe for the most part we would have left it to the, to the artist to determine where the page breaks would come. And so if you had a great storyteller they would do that very successfully. If they weren't such a good story teller you might get a kind of lopsided feeling about it. And, and I suppose that would be probably one of the things that I would loved to have gone back and changed. Because, I did it to a degree on "Moonchild" which is why you will often find there are title pages, with maybe only 2 or 3 images on it, and that would be me saying to John Armstrong, this is you know, we wanted to give *2000AD* impact and I only wish I had gone further on it and done more of the same. I know that, I'm quite proud of the fact that John Armstrong regards "Moon Child" as his best work and I think that's because we gave, we gave him the opportunity to shine in a way that perhaps elsewhere he hadn't.

69:22 JR

Did the art, well the other thing that interests me about the visuals of *Misty* is how, it felt kind of crazily angular in all this so like, the notion of sort of rows of panels almost completely goes out of the window on many pages, it's really hard to try and classify it in that way, which doesn't work for a lot of comics in theory. Is that something that the artists were told to do like "this is going to be our look, go nuts, put all these crazy angles in?" Was it just their individual kind of slant? Do you have any recollections of that?

69:54 PM

Yeah, I, it's, that's a difficult one. I think the, it probably comes down to the influence of *2000AD* and as always you probably picked up the vibe that's coming from me that often creators get the wrong end of the stick. And I think there may be an element of that here. Because what happened on *2000AD* was that I was very fortunate to have an art editor [Doug Church] and what he did was he took these rather old fashioned Argentinian artists who I was saddled with, and some old fashioned Spanish artists and Italian artists as well and he jazzed the page up. Generally for the, to the benefit of the story so for example, he wasn't just a case of having it with jagged lines which arguably dates back to an artist called Frank Bellamy on "Dan Dare", it was more than that, that what Doug my art editor on *2000AD* did he would say "So how are you going to end the page?" so I would tell him and he would say "Ah, that's not very good"! He would say "here is something a bit better". So then he would say "Look, why don't you have the heroes face coming out really big at the end" and so I would say to him "Doug that's brilliant" and I was more than happy to rewrite my stories and often did. I mean, Doug was almost, I wouldn't say he is the co-creator of *2000AD* but his work on *2000AD* was really important to it. And he, we still, still around but he doesn't really want to take any credit for what he did but however, the relevance of this to *Misty* is what I would have said to Wilf is "Let's bring that impact, energy" that *2000AD* had which was largely down to Doug Church and let's bring that into *Misty*. Now the trouble is that this is very much an individual's achievement so if someone else tries to imitate it, ok if they pick up the original energy from *2000AD* they, they may get it right, if they don't, in other words they don't know quite why they are doing it you are going to say "Oh that's a bit lopsided" or "What the fuck was the point of that?" because with Doug it wasn't just the jagged lines it was the fact that he would say "What's your opening picture?" and I would say "Well these guys are going along in a car" and he'd say "No, no, no that's boring", he said "give me something better" and I'd say "OK Doug, you've got a point". So this was, and if I sound a bit humble here it's because it was so rare in that company to have somebody to actually challenge you and say "That's pretty crap, give me something better!!" And it was so refreshing to have someone to if you like, sharpen your claws against and really up your game. So I have a feeling that what happened in *Misty* on occasion was that creative thinking that had a very sound logic behind it was just kind of, copycatted, you know...that's a clumsy thing to say, but it was, it was imitated without fully understanding why, what's the reason behind it. I think "Cult of the Cat" almost certainly owed something to Doug Church, I don't mean Doug laid it out but that, and there is clearly a *2000AD* influence there. Because for the first time you have got all that kind of incredible Ancient Egypt, and I think the same with the "Black Widow" story which I think are both by Bill Harrington, and they, they are trying to get that kind of *2000AD* sense of spectacle and I'm, and I'm not entirely sold on that. I think there are two schools of thought there and I think probably in my case I might, well I mean *Misty* is what it is, I think if I had had a closer grip on it, it wouldn't have gone in for too much rip-roaring adventure. And I think there probably is a case that some girls really didn't like that rip-roaring adventure and I think I am actually indulging a bit of my personal hatred of these

kind of stories! I know I have said this before but for instance my wife Lisa, I think she liked "The Lion, the Witch and The Wardrobe" and I hated it, but she liked it as a kid because it brought in that element of escapism, you know, she said "I didn't want all that kind of, kitchen sink reality" and I was just thinking "Why would you?" I mean who wants all that kind of you know...so I think there is an element of playing devil's advocate on myself that you know, maybe it was good to get in a bit of colour and perhaps if I had been you know, putting it together exclusively I think maybe it would have been too kitchen sink perhaps. For some readers.

75:51 JR

Yeah, I think as you say your direction was probably more of the terrifying, uncanny horror in everyday life. But there is some kind of, well I mean readers loved "Cult of the Cat" and the whole Ancient Egypt thing, personally I really did, and now I don't love it that much.

76:09 PM

I'm pleased to hear that because I remember when I read it thinking, thinking to myself because obviously I still had a toe in the editorial style of things even though, you know, I had carried out my brief and moved on. I remember reading that and thinking "no, no, no that's not quite right". And also feeling the same actually about "The Sentinels" thinking it's a great story but it's not a number one story and I think that feeling was born out of the time.

76:38 JR

Yeah ok. That's interesting. Well I suppose that leads me onto a little cluster of questions which will be the tail end of your real involvement in it...but this kind of moment at the end of '78 and start of '79 when you look at the collection as a whole there are some quite weird things happening, there are quite a lot of reused covers going on, there is no welcome text, then there is this publishers strike, do you remember anything about that point?

77:00 PM

God no, I think, I think it went through some painful periods and it sounds like that particular one, god, yeah.... I don't really know exactly what happened there, I think girls comics were the kind of fall guy of internal office politics. *2000AD* survived but I think the girls comics side of thing were kind of almost swept away in the, I'm not sure exactly when Maxwell bought up the IPC juveniles. But they kind of lost heart in them, it's this rather sad thing where, when I started on girls comics there was a buzz around them, they were passionate about them but I think by the end of the '70s there was a kind of indifference, have a feeling, I don't remember the strike but again probably because I was a freelance so I

wouldn't have been that involved in it you know.

78:19 JR

Yeah, no it's a fair comment. It was just quite, it was quite a weird point to happen because it's quite near the start of the run, it was only sort of 6 months in and *Misty* goes on for another year after that with no problems.

78:30 PM

Right.

78:31 JR

But yeah, that's fine. I will check the date with Maxwell because that would be interesting to....

78:33 PM: I think that would have been later then, I think that would of, I think *Misty* went into *Tammy* and then *Tammy* got killed off because of some further strike or some further difficulty with Maxwell.

78:48 JR

Ok, right well it probably happens after then. I suppose while we are on the kind of the ugly subject of the treatment of girls comics, I was just wondering if you have got any origin for the horrific term of "Hatch, match and dispatch"? Is this of your own devising, where this kind of came from?

79:03 PM

In, well let's first, let me linger on that for a moment, isn't it a horrible horrible term?

79:12 JR

Yeah horrible, horrible term. It's a horrible idea, horrible term.

79:14 PM

OK now he may deny it if you know, but I think at the time he would have said it with pride and that's John Sanders the publisher. In other words that was the norm and I mean, John is quite a Jekyll and Hyde character because on the one hand he unleashed me! You know, so here you have a guy who is saying things

like yeah, you know has no problem with this awful philosophy of you as a young reader get attached to this particular comic and becomes part of your way of life and when Saturday comes you are down the newsagent getting it all that kind of stuff, and then one day those horrible words "Great news inside" you know, with some pile of crap or even if it's not a pile of crap, but the thing is it's the rival, and you probably know this at least as well as me that readers identify with that particular comic so you would have *Romeo* readers and they would see themselves as very different from *Jackie* readers. *Jackie* readers would be quite snobby and think they were incredibly cool and I'm sure it was, in fact I know it was the same with comics like *Jinty* and *Tammy* and so on. So, but, I actually made a point of bringing this up with Sanders just around the time, just before *Action* came out, the board of directors were considering me as managing editor, in other words I had to go along to this interview and I thought rather stupidly that the thing to do was to tell it like it. In other words, the kind of enthusiasm I am displaying now, to display that to this board of suits, what a mistake! You would have done as equally as badly I think!!

81:30 JR

I can understand the attitude of "I'm going to tell it like it is and they are going to be impressed with my enthusiasm and I understand the need for real change here"

81:38 PM

I was very young!

81:41 JR

I'm not even very young so I don't have that excuse!

81:42 PM

Now, I mean, you know, the, I think it's taken me a lifetime to get the message that if you want to get on in a company then what you have to be is a suit. Act and just agree with everything they say. Say "Yeah that's great Sir!" as that's what they want and I do think that John Sanders could have primed me and said "Look, Pat, keep your mouth shut for a change!" I do wish he...instead he actually said to me, he had a very nasal voice, he would say "Pat, do you possess a suit?", and I said "I don't" and he said "Well this is quite an important job, perhaps you should get yourself a suit.....and a tie would be good as well!!". So I invested in a suit and tie but anyhow, I came out with this negative, you know, saying that "Hatch, match and dispatch" is wrong and all the rest of it. And I must have horrified these people because clearly I was, you know, a comics revolutionary in their eyes, so yeah I didn't get the job. But John Sanders at that time was very

proud of the term "Hatch, match and dispatch" it was, I mean it was strange because on the other hand he did have this sense of vision. First of all in unleashing me, in other words he didn't unleash, well perhaps one reason was he realised he needed what you might need maverick creators to produce exciting comics. But he still needed that conservatism and at the same time he still had all these people, staffers, who were itching for their redundancy who were jealous of his success because he had risen from the ranks himself, and they all thought they should of had the job. And they all hated each other, I mean the office politics was appalling and so I suppose in a way freelancers such as myself were, were quite a breath of fresh air to him. In as much as we weren't kind of resentful of the fact that he was the publisher, to us it was like "OK, he is the boss, what do you want us to do?" So we just got on with it. So to give you an idea of the weird politics of the time, I know it's not directly *Misty* but it does set the tone. When we produced our first comic revolution comic *Battle* we had to produce in a locked room, and we were told, and this was John Wagner and myself, if anyone asks what you are doing don't tell them because it's got to be a secret. Because otherwise the unions will be after us etc. etc. So we were kind of, we kind of strike breakers or scabs or something! And we were actually seen as freelancers as scabs. I mean people didn't like us because well, we were their worst nightmare, we were going to turn everything upside down and we did! So, yeah, so John Sanders is, it would be too easy to dismiss him as this conservative figure because he was, he was somehow, I couldn't get to the bottom of it but he was certainly both he was Jekyll and Hyde. I mean after all he, he was behind the more outrageous aspects of *Action*. I suppose at the end of the day he probably realistically thought "Well, I've got my job, I've got my pension, there's only so far I can go".

85:43 JR

Well maybe it was a tool for him as well to produce as much variety as possible. You know, maybe there was almost a kind of, "And this will allow us to produce new titles and then bundle them off" and so on.

85:54 PM

Yeah well there is some truth in that because he actually came up with the title *2000AD*, it wasn't me. And I remember very clearly saying to him "John, what happened if we get to the year 2000?" and he said something to the effect of "Yeah, you wish!!" And, but it gives you an idea of my thinking that I thought to myself "Yeah we could make it" and I had every confidence and I mean some people sometimes say to me "Aren't you thrilled that it made it to the millennium and beyond" and of course I am! But at the same time I, it wasn't a great surprise to me because I knew it had the potential, and indirectly it brings me back to *Misty* because girls comics were always so much more successful than boys comics and *2000AD* as a science fiction comic right, takes a lot more thought and work than a girls mystery comic to get that right by comparison isn't that

difficult. And that's why, I see you have heard me say this before but it bears repeating, I wish in a way that I had put my private life second and carried on with *Misty* because I really do believe that *Misty* would of been out there today and there would have been comic conventions where girls and women play a stronger role than just turning up playing cosplay.

87:32 JR

It's a good dream! It would have been nice, and it is coming I hope!! I'll get onto my last few questions as I'm sure I have taken up a lot of your time.

87:40 PM

Sure, go for it.

87:40 JR

Now you have brought up *2000AD* one question that I got asked very recently was about the similarities/differences to *Misty* and *2000AD* and I was talking to, well the main subject of my paper in a lot of *Misty* one-shots particularly, the rules are set – the protagonist breaks the rules – the protagonist is punished, and someone in the audience said "But this is the complete opposite to *2000AD*?", is this simply a gender difference or was there anything you wanted to speak to on that?

88:10 PM

Do you mean the fact that the protagonist, you mean "Good triumphs over evil" in girl's comics but not in *2000* or...

88:19 JR

Yeah but more kind of mavericks who break the rules are you know, are punished radically in *Misty* whereas not so much...

88:30 PM

Ah right, well I think the answer for that, I'm going to, I would say would be the conservative forces that took over after me. And I think the evidence for that is that if you consider my original "Paint it Black" story where the ending, I wouldn't say anyone is particularly punished it's just left kind of open if you like.... Yeah I certainly, even back on *Tammy* I was trying to break the, the traditional rules. I think on *2000AD* there, with the Future Shocks things, they would often, what you might call concepts, like *Twilight Zone* stories so the twist in the tale wouldn't necessarily be character driven and I suppose it's almost an easy thing to do to

end a story where you know, good triumphs over evil. But I think if we had explored those psychological stories from *Tammy* and also from *Pink* where there was some quite interesting psychological stories I think we could have ended up with some really weird stuff. So yeah regret that they were a little old fashioned I think.

89:54 JR

Yeah, that's interesting actually as one thing I've noted is the, they kind of stop sometimes with the protagonist under threat or in a bad way, but kind of not necessarily with everything in the story tied up which it has been argued elsewhere is kind of a very female sort of way of perhaps doing things. You kind of see it in soap opera rather than this very closed sort of solution. Is there anything about *Misty's* sort of horror that was specifically sort of designed for a female audience as you wrote it? Or, you know, is there a sense that horror works better for girls than boys?

90:31 PM

Well, I think I was so influenced by Stephen King and, and because *Carrie* struck me even when I saw it at the cinema, taking away all the adult stuff, it's yeah, despite that it's still such a riveting story and you think "That's how it's done, that's how it should appeal to young women" and bear in mind I really had a kind of training of this on *Tammy* where I kind of figured out what was working from looking at examples and writing my own. I mean I wrote probably, just thinking about this, maybe four or five what you might call mystery weird stories, certainly some for *Jinty* for example, "Girl in a Bubble" is this girl who thinks she has no immunity to disease so she is in this NASA type plastic bubble and obviously there is a sinister explanation for it etc. etc. But so yeah, I think there was always a sense that not just Stephen King but there was certain rules that could apply and this brings us back to the formula. Slave story arguably, the Ancient Egypt one or the "Black Widow" story probably have elements of that and the other examples you have given like "Nightmare Academy". Another really important girls comic concept which was drummed into me on *Tammy* and, you know, it can still apply in an esoteric or occult or magical way is the girl's desire for a friend that, that's a really important... So all those kind of basic formula rules can just as easily apply to the mystery and the occult. The one area that I was very resistant to was what I call old-fashioned adventure. There were elements of that in *Jinty* like "Fran of the Floods" and that, what's that about? It's an adventure story where things have flooded and you know, the heroines in rescuing cats and dogs and whatever, that's adventures and then something like "The Cat Girl" in *Sally* again old fashioned. Probably there was some sort of mystery of the "Four Mary's" in *June and School Friend*, again old hat. And there was a definite divide between the older generation at that time and our generation. And you know, we were told "We want new thinking" and that new thinking that we applied on *Tammy* I really carried that through to *Misty* as far as I could. And I'm sure if I'd

stayed with it I would have found other writers alongside the *Audrey Rose* writer and alongside Stephen King, I think, I think Stephen King wrote *Danse Macabre* and I think he wrote that two or three years after *Misty* had come out and I remember studying it and reading it from cover to cover. It's probably still relevant today as a guide as to you know, how to write mystery stories.

94:21 JR

Yes, it's an interesting book. OK, so there wasn't a sense that horror was particularly suited to girls in a way, or you know "We are going to do a kind of horror mystery story"?

94:29 PM

No, not in, I think we, I wanted the stories to be scary as hell, I wanted them to be scary and I think the word "horror" can sometimes, I don't know, conjure up something perhaps a little more gothic. Perhaps it's how we all respond to those individual words you know.

94:52 JR

That's a fair comment. I mean you have spoken a bit about kind of adapting people like King, and the guy who wrote *Audrey Rose* whose name eludes me as well at present. Is it just a question of taking out the gore? Or is there more to it?

95:09 PM

I think there should be, I think there should be more to it. I think what you have to find is something, you have got to find something of yourself in it. In other words you take a story like *Carrie* so OK you take out all the kind of sex and ultra-violence in *Carrie* and then you say "OK, what can I bring to this? What works for me?" So I would have drawn on personal recollections of bullying or sort of mildly psychic events that I was familiar with personally, so I would have brought those to bear, and I certainly did in the case of "Moonchild". So I think that is what if you like you know, gives a story a certain richness if you like. I think when I went on to do "Hush, Hush, Sweet Rachel" I don't think that worked anywhere near as well and I'm not quite sure why, I think it's partly the artwork, I do blame the artist, an artist called Fito, F-I-T-O, and I think his artwork is pretty dull but I don't think my story had quite the same edge and maybe that's because at the time I wasn't bringing enough of myself into it, do you know what I mean? In other words I was thinking "OK, so, the heroine or the main character is having these past life experiences, OK how do they do it in *Audrey Rose*? OK this is how I'm going to do it today..." and I think that sometimes happens with writers that, you know, you have a good idea but if you are not bringing some of your own personal energy into it then it's probably not going to do as well.

97:08 JR

That makes sense. Final question I suppose would be: was there any sort of public reaction to *Misty* at the time? Because I look at it now and as you say it's kind of framed by perhaps a more middle class exterior with *Misty* herself and this kind of beautiful artwork on the inside cover. But some of it is pretty horrifying so was there any sort of response to that at all?

97:32 PM

I don't recall it and I was pretty up on you know, media response, I think, you know what, I think it was because boys comics were really taking the flack and they, and as you doubtless know from, from *Action* and indeed *2000AD* and *Battle*, yeah there are people like Mary Winehouse were really after those kinds of comics. And there was a certain satisfaction you know in the fact that the girls comics were completely under the radar. I mean no one paid any attention to them, in fact if I go back right the way back to *Tammy* I don't remember anyone ever complaining about them. Now if you look at "Slaves of War Orphan Farm", my God, there's, I mean there is every reason to complain about it! I mean if one feels that way! For example, there is a scene where a girl gets her foot caught in a mantrap which has been laying around the quarry, and Ma Thatcher is using this quarry so I think by the time *Misty* had come along it was just more of the same and I mean looking back on it there is a certain satisfaction in that all these busybodies like Mary Whitehouse, you know, were far more interested in boys comics and meanwhile you could do what the hell you liked which was great!

99:11 JR

Fantastic, I suppose it comes down to the imagery as well, there's a lot of graphic stuff in *Action* and so on whereas with *Misty* it's kind of hidden between the panels, it's in the story.

99:22 PM

And I will often, I will often say, I remember saying this at the time that, probably gloating about it actually, that you could have psychological cruelty in girls comics and my God there was a lot that, I mean some of it a little bit clumsy and a bit crude if you like but there was psychological cruelty which is far worse than two people with a shark munching its way through somebody! Psychological cruelty probably leaves a much stronger mark on things you know, I think there is a footnote to all this constantly sort of reverberating in my mind when I recall all of this, the curse of girls comics was the pacing, the pacing could be, you know 28 pictures over 3 pages was ridiculous and then in *Misty* they nearly got it right. The idea of loosening it up a bit was to, so the thing would read so smoothly, if you think of a manga graphic novel aimed at girls today they are so smooth and I

think in the back of my mind that was what I was aspiring to. And Pat Davidson when she was on form her material generally flows very well but I think the person who had the strongest sense of flow, which I think is such an important element in all this because comics could be you know quite jumpy the way they move from scene to scene and that would be Malcolm Shaw. Malcolm had a very good flow on things and I think that was particularly tough on "The Sentinels" because he was dealing with two realities, you know, that the heroine is moving from modern day Britain into this Nazi occupied Britain and that does require skilled writing. And a lot of us at that time weren't as skilled as Malcolm in achieving that flow.

101:45 JR

Yeah, a great man. I have nothing more for you thank you so much for all of your time. Unless you think there is anything I really should of asked you that I haven't?

101:53 PM

No, no I think we have covered everything. Do come back to me on, on, sent me a reminder on Redondo or if there is anyone else you think I might know off. I think David Roach is going to be quite important for you, whoever he, even if it's something he doesn't know he might be able to put you in touch with someone else who might be able to fill in some gaps for you.

102:25 JR

Fantastic, the one other thing I would love to do at some point and I would appreciate it might be a massive encroachment upon your time is, I've got a list of little summaries of all the stories. If I send it to you would you be able to finger any you think you wrote particularly?

102:39 PM

Yeah off the top of my head, I would say on *Misty*, if we are just talking *Misty* I would say there's, there might be one that slipped under the radar but it's simply, I didn't write that many. I wrote "Hush, Hush, Sweet Rachel", "Moon Child", "Roots", "The Spider" one-shot, the original "Paint it Black" one-shot, and you know off the top of my head I'm not sure there were any others, there may have been one other one that I might have forgotten....

103:23 JR

Do you think it's all just staff writers then just filling in all these one-shots? Is it just the sort of stuff that's getting pumped out by the agency staff?

103:32 PM

Well when I say "staff writers" I might be misleading you there. There would have been other writers who would have been feeding into all this. Actually, yeah, I'm not even sure, I think the majority of the editors didn't actually write and probably couldn't write. I mean, there is a very small group of characters so on *Tammy* you see you had Gerry Finley-Day and that was followed by Wilf Prigmore who went on to be the group editor of the girls comics, Malcolm Shaw was I think the assistant editor on *Jinty*, Mavis Miller was the editor and then Malcolm probably went on to work on I don't know *Sandy* or *Tammy* or something. *Pink* they had a guy called [Rick Akin] who wasn't particularly good but none of these apart from the one I've mentioned like Malcolm and Gerry, there weren't really freelance writers, they didn't actually like writing stories very much. And so I think what they would have done yes, I bet Bill Harrington wrote a hell of a lot of stories, I suspect he did. Other than him, I'm trying to think if there is anyone else who's name really jumps out at me, I mean there was a great girl's comic writer on *Tammy* but I doubt he would have written mysteries, a guy called Charles Herring. He wrote "Ella on Easy Street", and – just a sense of background on him – he had been a radio writer and that's why his stuff was so bloody good. But, he had had a stroke and he communicated through his wife 'cause his verbal skills were pretty much zero but he obviously had all this creative energy from his radio days. Just, there was something about either his condition or his background that meant his stories, I mean it all sounds a bit weird doesn't it, but he actually had something going for him, something quite special. To the best of my knowledge they didn't use him on *Misty* though I certainly would have done, I would have said to his wife and she was called Sue Herring, I would have said "Sue look" you know "See if you can get Charles to do a really good creepy story" because I think he had written for the BBC and that's BBC radio so I think that's why hence "Ella on Easy Street", had the sophistication, I mean he is much older than us, and I think that sophistication really made a difference you know. I am sorry I can't be more.... I definitely feel there is someone else out there but I very much doubt it was Pat Davidson unfortunately, I think by the sound of what Wilf Prigmore was saying....have you thought about getting in touch with him?

106:51 JR

I haven't, he is on my list of people I need to find. So I will definitely check him out, because yeah there are 500 odd stories here. It's just like "Who wrote these damn things?!"

106:57 PM

He would probably know. And I mean, I think I have been a bit unfair to him and I am just about to add one concluding quote. It's a difference between freelancers, I mean he's a staffer and I was and am a freelancer and I've heard you have the

same thing at university even though they are worlds apart, I always remember the other thing he said which really gives you an idea of the divide - "It's an honour doing a cover for *Misty*, it's almost worth doing for nothing". You know! And this is heresy to a freelancer! Do something for nothing for the honour of it!! So that gives you an idea of just how aloof staffers were. But all that said, Wilf, because as I say he would come down regularly to Colchester to as it were pick my brains, and my task was to pass on the whole creative process of what I would have done on *Misty* to him. But I bet he knows a hell of a lot of those names that you are looking for.

108:13 JR:

I will hunt him down. Do you have details for him anymore?

108:15 PM

No, I mean he has really gone off the radar. I mean a lot of these guys really have distanced themselves, I'm relieved you don't want to get in touch with Gerry because he didn't really have anything to do with "Misty" really but he's very distant, he does not like to get involved. And I mean I hope Wilf is still around I mean he was, he would be about 64-65 now so hopefully he is around!

108:50 JR

Well it's amazing who knows who. I mean my approach to kind of finding people is pretty light touch, if they don't want to be found then, you know....

108:59 PM

There, there's that guy Steve Holland from, who does Bear Alley {blog} one of the things I always noticed about him, he actually lives in Colchester but we never really sort of hung out together, The reason I mention him is that any time someone dies he's always writing their fucking obituary!! [Distortion] So the relevance of this is a friend of mine who is to relevant, you know, your side of things, he's on the boys comics side, a fairly obscure character and he died rather recently and next thing I know Steve Holland has written another obituary about him. So you see where this is going? So it's possible he knows about, about how to get in, I mean he knows Mavis Miller and I think he wrote an introduction to the *Best of June and School Friend* or maybe the best of *Jinty* perhaps....no he couldn't have done that, that hasn't come out has it? But, if all else fails Steve Holland "Bear Alley", I bet, I bet he knows how to find Wilf Prigmore.

110:24 JR

Excellent, my search will start there! Thank you for that, it's very useful. I have this weird sort of family tree thing that I'm drawing somewhere of all these people's names all kind of hooked up.

110:36 PM

Well and just to, I, I mean yeah we both have to go but before I forget [distortion] in September on you know the *Misty* thing in fact, you know that drawing you did of *Misty*? I've passed that onto the *2000AD: Rebellion* publicist Michael Mulcher and said "Don't forget there is an academic out there who is writing a book about *Misty*" and you know, "Keep her informed" because you know, if he is looking for quotes or looking for some publicity angle, you know. So anyway...

111:12 JR

I've been promoting it far and wide to a very small community but thank you for that because Keith did get in touch and he got me to write 300 words on Shirley Bellwood just to go with the little image of hers inside.

111:25 PM

Oh that's good.

111:27 JR

Yeah because I have just interviewed some friends of hers, her neighbours who told me all about her kind of bigger artistic background. So yeah that was fantastic and I'm really happy to be involved in some tiny little way.

111:39 PM

I'm thrilled that you are because there is nothing worse than a biography written about someone where obviously the person written it doesn't have a clue who they are! Shirley I think was quite a character and another artist who used to do the *Tina* covers, quite a famous artist now at the Royal Academy or something like that. It still is undiscovered country apart from your book and apart from the *Misty* collection in September.

112:11 JR

Yeah fingers crossed it does well. I mean it looks like they are in the position to distribute it well so, yeah. Although they changed the logo which I kinda hate but I haven't said that to them!

112:22 PM

I agree with you, why do that? Why? I mean the new one.... and I'm also disappointed that they didn't have a couple of one-shot stories. I'm gutted that they didn't.

112:34 JR

Yeah.

112:35 PM

There is obviously some crappy logic behind that. I did tell them but... it's me going back into freelance rant again... "Why the fuck don't you listen?"

112:48 JR

I said the same thing, in interviews with a couple of people from online stuff, I have stressed the point that it would be good to have a collection of one-shots. It does seem a shame they didn't squeeze one in – I mean its four pages for god sake.

113:03 PM

Well I think yeah, I can't understand that but I do think that, I'm pretty sure it will do well as there is a lot of interest. In fact, one fairly guaranteed group of sales are going to come from *2000AD* fans, because the story they have probably heard endlessly about, you know, "I used to read my sisters *Misty*" you know that kind of stuff. So there are a lot of them who, I think it will do well, I think it will do well enough to spawn a sequel. And I think at that point, I think that's when I'm going to say to the Rebellion guys "Look you are going to have to canvas people such as yourself and so on" because after the two obvious contenders I honestly couldn't say what should be the next, the next possibility. You know they really have got to do their homework. I think the first volume is an easy one, it's pretty obvious that you had, in my view, you had to do "Four Faces of Eve" and you had to do "Moonchild" but after that.... yeah well let's see!!

114:12 JR

Well there are a lot of people out there who would be willing to be asked I think. There's a lot of very vocal people about what they like about it. So yeah it would be great to tap into that. But it would be really great to get the new readership, which I hope is what will happen.

114:24 PM

Oh man, so do I, I am, it would be the, the biggest thrill I think would be to get those modern girls and I, you probably already know this but I have tried these stories out on the actual genuine readership and it works for the most part, they seem to like them. And there is none of this, I think the only one you have probably heard me say this or I've probably said this at somewhere on "Glenda's Glossy Pages" my two nieces didn't like the main character, they thought she wasn't very pretty!

115:01 JR

Indoctrinated!

115:06 PM

Sadly yeah! That never occurred to me I was, you know, they said "No I don't like the artwork" and I said "What's the matter with it?" and this was an age range somewhere between 13 - 15 and 17 approximately and they said "No, she doesn't look very good". For God's sake!!! Never mind, never mind!

115:30 JR

I don't know how I feel about that!!

115:33 PM

Yeah I think that's why I mentioned it! I'm not sure how I felt about it, it never occurred to me at the time.

115:41 JR

You should just say "Blame the artist!"

115:44 PM

Yeah well they didn't particularly like the story as well, they said "Look at all this repetition, why is she saying this when she doesn't need to?" so I said to them "Well this was my first girls comic serial so that's why it's a bit clunky round the edges". So OK then!

115:47 JR

Thank you Pat so much for being so generous with your time.