****

**AMA about Powers Squared, a new comic book with**

**college-aged identical twins as the heroes.**

Between July 6 to 13, 2018, Powers Squared hosted an Ask Me Anything at comicsama.amafeed.com. Unfortunately, the AMAfeed site is no longer active. We’re presenting here the questions we were asked and the answers that we provided. The answers should be considered from the creative team in general unless there are initials in front of the answer and then they are from that individual. DH: David Hankins (Co-Creator, Co-Writer) PH: Paul Hankins (Co-Creator, Co-Writer, Editor) TH: Trevor Hankins (Co-Creator, Letterer) RW: Rachel Wells (Artist). Note: Nina Gaillard, our colorist at the time, was asked to participate as well but declined.

**What's the theme of your series, Powers Squared?**

Powers Squared is about alienation and belonging. On the one side, as twins, the boys have been somewhat insular and different from everyone else. Part of the reason for them moving to another city to go to school was to try to reset their lives, make new friends, meet girls and find someplace to belong. The fact that they discover that they have these powers, and must keep them a secret, once again sets them apart from their family and friends.

**Obviously keeping a presence at conventions is necessary for those in the independent field, but in what other ways do you promote your work and do you have any advice on the subject for any up and comers out there?**

A very good question. Even though it’s been several years, I feel like we’re just starting out. We have not yet had a presence at a convention, mostly because we didn’t have anything tangible to show. We will no doubt have to change that. However, one piece of advice that I will dispense is “Don’t spend money unless you’re making money.” Putting together a comic book is not an inexpensive endeavor, especially when you’re relying on others to be artist, colorist and letterer. Renting a table and having printed issues and, let’s say, t-shirts to sell can be an outlay of cash that you might not want to make, especially if you have other real-world expenses as well.

So far with conventions, we’ve been trying to learn craft and meet people. Sometimes that can be daunting, but you just have to try. As an example, at the recent WonderCon I spoke with an editor of a comic book website and ended up getting the first two issues reviewed, and I wasn’t even prepared with an elevator talk. That helped pave the way for the next three issues getting reviewed and so on. When you do get some mention, then be sure to let your followers know about it and be sure to credit the source, since they will most likely have a much bigger following and will most likely like and retweet whatever it is you post about them.

We were also helped this time out by our publisher, comiXology, who provided us with some professional PR push. Again, this would be an expense that we wouldn’t have been able to afford on our own. But the important thing is to make the most of it.

We have been trying to organically grow our social media presence, which is slow, through [our website](file:///F%3A%5CMy%20Writing%5CPowerSquared%5CAMA%5Cpowerssquaredcomicbook.com): a [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/PowersSquaredComicBook/); [Twitter](https://twitter.com/MartyandEli); [Instagram](file:///F%3A%5CMy%20Writing%5CPowerSquared%5CAMA%5CInstagram); [YouTube Channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtA7j9i-B44bEcoPuGejhMA); and, most recently [Tumblr](https://www.tumblr.com/blog/powerssquaredcomicbook). The idea is to get the information about your project out there, but not to spend all day long doing it. A good rule of thumb is not to spend more than an hour. You can tie some of these together, like have an Instagram post show up on Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr, so you can get the most mileage from a single post. (Check out the Applets on <https://ifttt.com>; a word of caution: be careful as we’ve had some stop working on us.)

We’ve found that Instagram seems to be a very good way to grow attention as we’ve gone, in relatively short time, from four followers to near 100, which is still small potatoes but still great growth. I’m also trying to repurpose some of what I write in a weekly blog in Tumblr as well. I’m already writing about the comic book in one place, why not use it there as well?

**How would you describe the story-telling style you used for Powers Squared and what draws you to this type of style?**

Since we were working on a comic book we wanted to come up with, there are certain expectations you must address but at the same time we wanted to put a twist on some of the conventions. Paul and Trevor were really into comics and anime/manga at the time, so they wanted to bring in some Japanese mythos as well, hence the Kitsune who grants Marty and Eli their powers.

The idea that the powers these boys have was sort of thrust onto them is really nothing new but we think the fact that they have to share powers and don’t necessarily have all the same ones also made it unique. Since Paul and Trevor were identical twins we thought it would be nice to make the heroes identical twins as well, which we have learned is not all that common as well.

We also threw in a bit of pseudo-science with the Viribus compound as something the villain would want to harvest. While it doesn’t give the boys their powers they are a byproduct of them.

I like to think that in addition to a superhero story, we’re also bringing in elements of New Adult Fiction, a genre that deals with young men and women starting out on the steps to adulthood: going away from home, getting jobs, meeting people and setting up romantic relationships.

RW: As we’ve been saying, the marriage of Western art and anime is really important here. I’ve enjoyed using a mix of Western and Eastern storytelling techniques for this comic, since I feel both styles can bring something unique to the table. They each work off each other’s weaknesses to make a final product that’s even stronger than either two by themselves, which has been a lot of fun realizing as a project.

**How has Powers Squared been received?**

Well, let’s say our first two issues came and went with little fanfare. We got published on the comiXology website, which is sort of like being on Netflix. If you knew we were there, you might look for us but if not, we were one of 10,000 released that day and in the “P” section no less. We did get the first two reviewed several months later. The first received 3 out of 5 and the second 4 out of 5 but had little bump in sales.

We were also doing all of this by the seat of our pants. This was the first comic book we’d ever done and we had zip in the way of social media presence, which didn’t help.

This time around comiXology did give us a PR push, which resulted in a preview on [Adventures in Poor Taste,](http://www.adventuresinpoortaste.com/2018/06/25/exclusive-comixology-preview-powers-squared-3/) an interview with [FreakSugar](http://www.freaksugar.com/powers-squared-interview/) and reviews on [First Comics News](https://www.firstcomicsnews.com/?s=Powers+Squared) (3 out of 5 across the board). Not sure what impact that will have on sales.

It might not come as a surprise, but we haven’t received any feedback on the issues from readers, other than the ones we gave copies to ahead of publication. While their reactions have been very positive, we would love to hear what paying readers have to say.

**What is the most unusual part of your job, or something people can’t believe you do?**

DH: I don’t think it’s anything I do on the comic book, but probably rather the people I work with on my day job have little or no concept about me doing a comic book.

PH: When I’ve talked to other people in my classes about it, they seem fascinated by the fact that I not only work with my dad on a comic, but that I have a parent who’s narratively-minded as well.

RW: Hmm, probably sitting at home and drawing for most of the day! I’m sure that sounds like a dream for most people but it’s definitely very hard work, and I take steps to make sure I don’t overwork myself (like stretching, eating and sleeping!). But despite all that, there’s nothing that makes me more content than drawing with a nice cup of coffee.

**Who are you, and how can people learn more about you and your work?**

Powers Squared is made by 5 people. David and Paul do most of the writing, Trevor does the lettering. Our artist is Rachel Wells and our colorist is Nina Gaillard. You can find websites and blogs for each on our website under Creative Team.

RW: I’m a cartoonist based in Savannah, Georgia who’s slowly trying to figure out what I’m doing! I’m most active on Twitter (twitter.com/drawsfromrachel) and Tumblr (rachelsdraws.tumblr.com), so you can keep up with my escapades there!

**What is the origin story for your two lead characters?**

When Marty and Eli were seven, they happened upon a fox trapped under a fallen tree trunk in the woods near where they lived. They were surprised when the fox, who turned out to be a kitsune, asked for their help. Together the two boys pushed the branch away. Grateful, the kitsune wanted to reward them but all she had to give were powers. However, since the kitsune had been hit in the head she was a little woozy. Instead of seeing two boys, she saw only one. As a result, Marty and Eli didn’t receive all the same powers and the ones they share only one can use a particular power at the same time. The boys didn’t even realize they had these powers until they presented them in front of their college science teacher, Instructor Miller, who had been trained on what to look for by the evil Dr. Horatio Atlas. Until then, they knew they were telepathic but assumed that was because they were twins.

**What would you consider to be your favorite panel from any of your last five issues and what is about this panel that you prefer?**

DH: If I had to pick one, I would say Panel 8 Page 14 Issue #1. It’s Dr. Atlas looking as evil and threatening as he could get. This is one of the best examples of when our vision and our artist at the time (Sika Murti) were in sync.

**What in your opinion is more important: the story or the art in a comic and what are the reasons for your answer?**

Well, as a writer I would tell you that it’s the story but I know that the art is really very important, since comic books are essentially sequential art. If it doesn’t look good, people won’t bother to read it. The art is the conduit for telling your story and is what makes the first impression.

RW: As an artist who occasionally writes, I feel neither one is more important than the other, since both story and art need to work together in some way to make a comic. However, as a more visually-oriented person I tend to be much more attracted to art than story. I guess it just depends how I’m feeling!

**What was the most difficult thing about breaking into the comic book industry?**

Good question, not sure we’ve actually broken in. I would say it’s getting attention to your book. Even though the story might be good. if no one sees it then it doesn’t matter unless you’re doing it as a vanity project. The most difficult thing is growing a fan base from the ground up.

RW: For me, probably just accepting the fact that finding success in comics involves a whole lot more than skill: it’s so much about networking yourself and just knowing the right people. I’ve dealt with social anxiety my whole life, so the thought of putting my future in the hands of strangers was really hard to come to terms with. It got a lot easier for me as I went through school and developed an online following, and I hope with projects like Powers Squared and other works I can find my way about the weird world of comics better!

**Do you have any interests in more mainstream comics, and if so, which characters or properties would you most like to get your hands on?**

DH: If asked, I’d be happy to work on something mainstream. I’ve been a fan of Captain America and Captain Marvel, so I would say one of those, but if Marvel (or DC or IDW or Boom!) calls I’ll answer.

PH: If I had the opportunity to work on a mainstream book, I’d probably try to do Deadpool, since he’s one of my favorite Marvel characters. He’s able to get away with stories and jokes that other mainstream heroes can’t.

TH: Not sure if this counts as mainstream, however, if given the opportunity, I’d happily work on the Transformers comics from IDW Publishing. Transformers as a property is something I’ve been passionate about my whole life and I’d love to bring my own voice to it (especially since they’re about to reboot the comic).

RW: Personally, I’ve never been very interested in most mainstream comics, although there are a few big properties like Saga that I really love. I’d love to someday work on a licensed comic aimed at younger readers like Steven Universe or My Little Pony or something like that.

**What element of your work gives you the most personal satisfaction?**

DH: Taking an idea that my sons and I had and seeing it through to completion. While I hope it will lead to something else for us, I think it has been working with them that has given me the most satisfaction.

PH/TH: Being able to actually put my comics knowledge to good use when suggesting ideas for stories/edits or other visual elements.

RW: Honestly, the finished product! I love stepping back and feeling proud of my finished drawings after working really hard on them, even if it’s just a single panel. It’s even better when I get to see it in color!

**What methods do you use to draw your characters in Powers Squared consistently?**

That would really be a question for the artists, who are unfortunately not part of this AMA. Consistency is something that we’ve tried to maintain, though the lack of it towards the end of the second story arc made us decide to switch artists.

RW: When I draw/design certain characters, I find that giving them particular, distinct features helps me both differentiate characters and draw them consistently from panel to panel. As I draw out a scene I consider things like height, build, face shape, eye shape and sometimes even nose shape to give characters a unique look that I can draw again easily. Hope that makes sense!

**How do you feel about the way Kickstarter is seemingly changing the game as far as self-publishing is concerned?**

We would really like to take advantage of that in the very near future, as a matter of fact. Our concern has been having a largest enough following to make people want to help us complete a story arc. We know how expensive it can be to put together a book and Kickstarter and other crowd funding platforms help to alleviate some of those costs.

RW: The whole surge in crowdfunding options is super exciting for artists like me! It’s made self-publishing so much more accessible for creators, and it’s so much easier for fans to support their favorite creators directly. I’ve definitely considered taking advantage of crowdfunding for my work, so we’ll see how that goes someday!

**How do you achieve that distinct look? Do you have any unusual tools in your arsenal?**

Again, a really good question for an artist. We were shooting for a Western/manga mix look and think that with our new artist, Rachel Wells, that we’re much closer to that look.

RW: The style I use for Powers Squared kind of developed naturally from my more “realistic” style, for lack of a better term – it started with me trying to mimic Sika Murti’s style from issues 1-5 while improving on things like anatomy, form, expression, etc., and eventually evolved into this Western/anime hybrid David and Paul were going for. To keep things consistent, I like to reference works like The Legend of Korra and Voltron: Legendary Defender that morph anime and Western cartooning in that way.

**What got you into writing/drawing comic books or graphic novels?**

San Diego Comic-Con. After attending it for several years, my sons and I were talking about how to get on a panel rather than just attend them. Making a comic book seemed to be the most direct route. Still not on any panels, but we guess its still something to shoot for.

RW: I’ve been drawing cartoons for pretty much my entire life, and I’ve always known that I wanted to be an illustrator of some kind. I kind of slowly got into comics when I started going to SCAD as I fell in love with the opportunities that come with visual storytelling

**What process do you follow to create characters and their personalities?**

A good question. The creation of a character is a collaborative process. Some of it comes from the writing obviously and some from the artist. A lot the chemistry comes from the dialogue which the artist doesn’t usually have any input on.

Since the two main characters are based on the creators, we wanted them to look like them and have their general interests. Paul and Trevor are close and we wanted Marty and Eli to be close, as well. But even though Marty and Eli are based on real people, neither talks with same colloquialisms that Marty does sometimes. The idea was to make them similar but still different from their real-life models.

Sometimes there is a look we’re going for that has nothing to do with the other characteristics. As an example, for Mocha we were looking for a woman with exotic coloring so we used adult film actress Tera Patrick as the model; she’s a mix of Thai, Dutch, English and Irish. To make her more exotic we gave her Elizabeth Taylor’s violet colored eyes.

There is a new character, Professor Theorem, we’re developing for the next story arc, who’s look is based on K.Flay, the alt rock musician, because I’m a big fan of hers and her work. But besides being smart, she has nothing else to do with the character.

There is usually someone we have in mind for the parts, at least visually. Sometimes they’re real and sometimes they’re characters from anime or video games. Case in point, Jennifer’s look is based on Jennifer from Disgaea; Steve is based on Simon Helberg from the Big Bang Theory. Dr. Atlas, our main villain, started out with Doc Brown from Back to the Future as the model.

Uncle Brian is based on two people, Scott Fresina, who teaches Paul and Trevor guitar and art respectively, just as their uncle in the comic book does, with the visual of Bruce Campbell from his Burn Notice days thrown in for good measure.

**What tools do you rely on in your day-to-day work?**

On a day-to-day basis, we use Word, Dropbox, WeTransfer and Outlook. Lettering is done in Adobe Illustrator and we use Photoshop as well. We don’t know what tools the artist use to do their work. But we’ll ask.

RW: For penciling/inking I use Clip Studio Paint with a Bamboo Create drawing tablet! Pretty much all of my work is digital.

**What inspired you to create and develop Powers Squared? Why did you choose to write comics?**

I think we’ve already answered why we decided to create Powers Squared. We continue to develop it with the hope that someday soon it will reach an audience. Writing for comics was the only way for us to develop the series. While, this is our first endeavor into comic books, we do all write reviews for a blog Paul started several years ago called [Trophy Unlocked](http://trophyunlocked.blogspot.com). Paul is working on an urban fantasy novel while attending the UCLA Extension Fiction Writing certificate program. David writes a thus unpublished detective series of books and also writes a weekly blog about his writing.

**How is it like to work with your brother? How do you make decisions and how do you solve disagreements?**

PH: That’s an interesting question. There aren’t really any difficulties with working with Trevor, but that’s probably because we work on different parts of the process or we end up independently coming up with story ideas at different times. If there are any disagreements, it’s usually in the lettering when there’s a discrepancy between how much text is in the script and how much will actually fit. I’m sure he can tell you more about that.

TH: In earlier issues I tried working within what is called a “safe zone” so that, for those who don’t know, the lettering doesn’t get cut off should the comic get printed, assuming that ever happens (this also influenced where I placed the title on early issues, making room for cover bugs). The safe zone eventually proved to be a bit restrictive at times, particularly in smaller panels (one reason I stopped using it when the artist changed), not helped when lines in the script would translate to walls of text in Illustrator. Disputes such as these would be resolved by working with the writers to re-write certain dialogue such that it sounded more natural while still conveying the original intent of the script and fit within the given space. Ditching the safe zone freed up more space (and works better for digital), although this issue still comes up on occasion.

**How long does it take to produce an issue? How is the process?**

The amount of time varies. The first two issues took a year for the artist to complete and we had to have them recolored so that took another four months. Issues 3-5 took about a year for the art and coloring.

The process is to start with a script and that can take several weeks to write with several revisions along the way. Some of the scripts for the issues we’re starting to work on now were originally written about three and four years ago. Earlier this year, David and Paul spent several weeks rewriting them into a longer story arc.

Our current artist, Rachel Wells, is much more consistent with pages and does 8 a month for us. Nina Gaillard, our colorist starts about a month behind the artist and also does 8 pages a month. Part of keeping it to 8 pages a month is to keep costs down. At present, everything is out of pocket and 8 pages is about as much as can be afforded.

Rachel, after reading the script, sends us two versions of thumbnails for the next 8 pages. Paul and I review them and pick some from each version. She then sends us a layout which review and approve. Then she sends us pencils and then inks. The completed inks are then sent via Dropbox to the colorist, Nina, who adds the completed pages back when she’s done.

Paul and David review and approve everything as it goes through the process, sometimes asking for a tweak here and there, more so in the early parts of the process.

Once the pages are colored, they’re sent via We Transfer to Trevor who then letters them.

RW: We work in batches of 8 pages a month, so I pencil and ink an entire 20-page issue in about 2.5 months. My work process starts by just reading the script and making thumbnails, tiny sketches that help me get my ideas down quickly. For each page I make 2 different thumbnails to explore the best ways to portray the story. After David and Paul approve the thumbnails I use them to make pencils, which is a whole process in and of itself – I make perspective grids for all the panels (Clip Studio Paint’s perspective ruler is a lifesaver for this part!), then I draw backgrounds, then I draw the characters. After sending a draft to the Hankins I make any necessary changes and eventually I just ink over the pencils in another layer. Overall a single page from start to finish takes around 16-18 hours!

**What do you hope your readers will take away from Powers Squared?**

Well, we hope that they might see something of themselves in the main characters, as everyone wants to find a way to fit in despite all the things that make them different. And, of course, we hope that readers are intrigued enough to want to see more.

**How much of your own personality traits have permeated into your work?**

PH: I'm not sure how similar I am to Marty. Like me, he's a bit more outgoing than Eli is and he also enjoys video games and playing guitar. Like us, Marty and Eli sometimes argue, but are ultimately there for each other. Unlike me, Marty sometime speaks in outdated colloquialisms.

RW: This is kind of a tough question for me since the Powers Squared style isn’t one I typically work in. I do feel like I’m generally an empathetic and passionate person, thus I put a lot into making the characters I draw very expressive and relatable, which I hope helps this comic really come alive.

**How do you divide the workload between you and your brother?**

PH: We both contribute story ideas and edit the script. However, I'm more directly involved with the process since I also help look through and approve the work of the artist and colorist while Trevor mainly does the lettering.

**Has anime/manga been a influence in your comic? If so, any title in particular?**

Anime/manga has certainly had an influence in Powers Squared. One title which had an influence on our work the most is JoJo's Bizarre Adventure by Hirohiko Araki, particularly when it comes to the application and limits of some of the powers. We also reference it every so often by including a single Japanese onomatopoeia in an issue. We may include some other anime references in the future, though sparingly.

RW: Absolutely! As we’ve discussed in other answers, anime has had a huge influence on both the story and the visuals. Anime was also instrumental to my artistic growth as I was still finding my voice, especially Lucky Star and Wolf’s Rain (two of my all-time favorites!) – although my usual art is a lot less anime these days, I like to think that early influence is still present at least somewhat.

**What is your greatest ambition for your comic?**

First, we'd like to see it become sustainable. Beyond that, our greatest ambition would be to see it made into a TV Series or a movie or a video game.

RW: For Powers Squared, I mostly just hope we can provide a fun, unique, creator-owned story for a supportive audience! I would love for the comic to someday have a Patreon or even a print run.

**Who is your favorite twin of Power Squared and why?**

The middle one. Asking us to pick a favorite twin from the comic book is really next to impossible.  Marty and Eli are both equally important to the story.

RW: Haha, I’m gonna have to go with Marty, since I like drawing long hair! But as characters I probably relate more to Eli since he’s the more visually artistic one.

**How much character development should readers expect to see in your comics?**

Part of the idea behind Powers Squared is to watch Marty and Eli, as well as their friends, become adults out on their own. They’re all going to go through growing pains as they have relationships, go to school, get jobs, etc. We’re also planning on stories that sometimes deal with the side characters, as an example, our next story arc involves their friend Kirby.

**If you were forced to live the rest of your life as one of your characters who would it be?**

Probably won’t come as a surprise, but Paul would pick Marty and Trevor Eli since these are characters based on themselves.

RW: Hmm, I think Mocha, since being a kitsune would be awesome!

**What do you think most characterizes your writing?**

We’d like to think we have a good sense of story but are also fun to read.

**What would it take to have a Patreon or a print run?**

Rachel brought up the idea of Patreon in one of her answers and that does intrigue us. I would think we would need to have a larger fan base to pull something like that off, as well as figure out if there were other things we need to do if we were to go that route. As far as a print run, we’re going to look into print-on-demand after Comic-Con. At present, doing a print run on our own is a financial bridge too far.

**Why did you choose to write a comic book? Would you like to write other genres?**

The comic book grew out of a desire to do something that would get us on a panel at Comic-Con (mission still not accomplished) and to do something creative as a family. All three of the Hankins also write reviews for Paul’s blog, [Trophy Unlocked](http://trophyunlocked.blogspot.com). In addition, David has been working on a series of thus far unpublished detective mysteries for several years and writes a weekly blog about his writing life, [A Week in Writing](http://1000wordsadayeasily.blogspot.com/). Paul is currently working on an Urban Fantasy novel and is attending the UCLA Extension Fiction Writing certificate program.