

Tubularman

By Boomer Cardinale



Fritch

By Critch



Comic book focuses on urban reality

JUST THE BEGINNING

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A man watches a rape from his bedroom window and does nothing. He later goes to an all-night convenience store and blows away a dozen police officers while fleeing from some thugs.

It's another bloody night in the big city as depicted by the creators of "Flatbush Native," a new comic book series aimed at inner city audiences.

And rather than providing positive role models, the creators' goal is to portray the stark realities of urban living.

"We're not trying to glorify violence, but at the same time we're not trying to sugar coat reality," said Kemp Powers, the editor of Flatline Comics.

"If there's violence, it's in relation to what's going on in the story."

Powers is one of three Howard University sophomores who started the comic book after their idea was rejected by the school newspaper.

Two issues of "Flatbush Native" are on sale in the District of Columbia at \$2.50 each, and the creators are seeking a distributor.

Flatline joins an increasing number of black-owned companies seeking to fill a gap in the \$500 million-a-year comic book industry with Afrocentric or inner-city story lines.

But most have sought to redefine black characters from their traditional comic book roles as villains or sidekicks.

Big City Comics, based in Irving, Texas, has created the urban superhero Brotherman, while Greensboro, N.C.-based ANIA, an association of black comic companies, has created such heroes as Ebony Warrior, The Original Man and Zwanna: Son of Zulu.



By Jason Brown

Flatline's editors say they are more interested in reflecting urban reality.

Their "heroes" use their powers to help themselves instead of saving the world and are as likely to do bad things as good.

The character in the first issue is not punished by story's end.

The idea has not caught on for everyone, including a fellow creator of Afrocentric comic books.

"I think the black community has had enough of the black man depicted as violent, doing drugs," said Roosevelt Pitt Jr., creative director and co-owner of ANIA.

But Steven L. Jones, a cartoon historian and art consultant in Philadelphia, says moral ambivalence has a special appeal for young people these days.

Powers, 19, and his partners, Ornette Coleman and Will Watkins, both 18, came up with

the idea for Flatline Comics while talking about how they thought comic books ought to reflect real life. And to Powers, who grew up in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, N.Y., the real world is violent.

In "Flatbush Native," the protagonist can charge himself up like a battery with superhuman power by killing another person. But the energy will kill him within minutes unless he uses it destroying his enemies.

The heroes in other series now in the works are not all black and the stories are not always violent, Powers said.

"But all of our characters are very, very human. They all encounter things such as greed, lust — some things that mainstream characters never have go through their minds," he said.

"You never saw Captain America look twice at a woman. Well, it doesn't work that way."

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