

WATER COLORES

ENTERTAINMENT & DIVERSIONS

HOLY HOMOPHOBIA!

DC Comics' Green Lantern faces a new foe — a gay basher — thanks to *Real World* alumni Judd Winick.

BY JOHN F. SULLIVAN



Green Lantern's alter ego Kyle Rayner is about to learn a hard lesson when he finds that even super powers are no match against violent homophobia. In DC Comics' *Green Lantern Issue No. 154*, which goes on sale this month, Rayner's world will be irreversibly rocked when the cartoonist-by-day's teenaged intern is the victim of a gay bashing.

Although the character of Terry Berg, Rayner's gay 17-year-old assistant, has been out in the pages of one of DC's hottest selling titles for well over a year, this is the first time *Green Lantern's* writer, Judd Winick, has pushed the envelope this far. And Winick says he has no regrets about doing it.

Winick, who took over writing duties back in 2000, is no stranger to taking a stand on issues he feels passionately about, especially gay ones. Winick was one of the cast members on MTV's *The Real World: San Francisco* in 1994. And it was his friendship with his HIV-positive gay roommate Pedro Zamora that was the inspiration for his graphic novel *Pedro & Me*. The novel, released in 2000, tells the moving tale of their friendship and Zamora's death in 1994 at age 22.



Green Lantern Issue No. 154 features openly gay character Terry Berg as the victim of a gay bashing.

"When I came into the show I never would have thought in a million years that I would have become an activist — but I guess I am," says 34-year-old Winick. "I

write and draw stories and a lot of those stories deal with issues that I was exposed to by living with and knowing Pedro."

Winick's professional cartooning career started at age 16 with a weekly single panel comic called *Nuts & Bolts*, published throughout the Tri-State, New York area. He took the strip with him to college at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor and turned it into a four-panel strip that ran in the *Michigan Daily* until 1992. After graduating, Winick spent a year living in Boston developing his strip. He eventually moved back to his hometown on Long Island.

It was not long after that he saw an ad for *The Real World*. After a long audition process, Winick was chosen to be one of the seven roommates. In February of 1994, Winick

moved into the house on Russian Hill and his life hasn't been the same since. While he was filming the show, *Nuts & Bolts* was

given a weekly spot in the *San Francisco Examiner*. It was also during that time that he met his future wife Pam Ling.

At the same time, Judd was learning some important life lessons including what it's like to be living with HIV. Through his friendship with Zamora, he saw first hand what people who are positive have to deal with, from the illness itself to the ignorance of those who don't understand it.

"Meeting Pam and Pedro was the best thing to come out of my *Real World* experience," Winick says. "It's as simple as that."

Shortly after the show started airing, Zamora fell ill due to AIDS-related complications and had to be hospitalized. Zamora had been scheduled to start a lecture tour. When he couldn't do it, Winick stepped in and agreed to speak on his behalf. Even after his friend died a few months later, Winick continued to speak at high schools and colleges across the country about his friend and AIDS education and prevention.

"I was doing it because we had an audience and we could reach them and it is what Pedro would have done," Winick says.



DAME EDNA is heading back to Florida with her new show *A Night with Dame Edna*.

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE A DAME!

Australian housewife turned megastar, Dame Edna Everage, returns to Florida with her saucy brand of humor.

Interview by
Scottie Campbell

It is nerve racking doing interviews; to take someone's life and encapsulate it in a few words is a daunting task. The bigger the life, the more intimidating the job is. Imagine the awesome responsibility of being given the opportunity of interviewing a megastar, indeed *the* megastar.

When Dame Edna Everage was born — by all reports "a lovely child with beautifully formed purple hair" — the nurse presented her to her parents in a comfy bundle. Instead of announcing the bundle to be a boy or a girl, the nurse said, "It's a megastar!" That's the first known use of the word in our language.

Everage first gained notoriety in the '70s with stage shows in Australia that were later repeated in London. A



HOLY HOMOPHOBIA

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After the experience of touring and still wanting to reach young people with the message of AIDS prevention, Winick decided to do the graphic novel *Pedro & Me*. The novel went on to win several awards and has been added to school curriculums and put into libraries.

"It was a way for us to still reach young people without having to go out there ourselves," says Winick. "It was a way to get to thousands of people at one time and get the information out there to them and send the message home with them." Writing the novel also helped Winick realize that he

wanted to do more with "storytelling" and less with cartooning. And after his good friend Bob Schreck took over editing duties at DC Comics, the opportunity to write the stories for comic books presented itself.

"I was probably one of the few people who didn't call Bob the moment his ass hit the door at DC to look for work," Winick says. "We had been talking about *Green Lantern* for a couple of months and Ron Marz was leaving and Bob said I obviously had a handle on the

character and what did I think of writing it. I was thrilled."

The openly bisexual Schreck had already been talking to Marz, *Green Lantern's* writer from 1991 to 2000, about adding a gay teen character to the comic. When Winick took over writing the comic it was left to him to flesh out the details. It was his first official issue that brought the introduction of Terry Berg to the regular cast of characters.

"When we first introduced him he had a very positive experience with coming

out. His friends have been enormously supportive, his parents have been kind of running the middle line on it, but it's been good," Winick says. "He has sort of found

himself and he's comfortable about who he is. That is the most positive experience that one can have with coming out, and now I guess we are exploring the most negative."

The issue dealing with the hate crime hasn't even hit the stands yet and the reaction has already begun. After a piece in the *New York Times* ran in August the media has been all over the story. And like with anything gay positive, the religious right has also come out of the woodwork to lambaste the comic and it's creators, accusing them of spreading

misinformation about homosexuality. On a recent appearance on Phil Donahue's show, Winick was put up against Peter Spriggs of the Family Research Council, a group known for its anti-gay stance.

"That was just insane. We didn't even get the chance to talk about hate crimes because he was too busy trying to debate the existence of homosexuality," says Winick. "With lunatics out there like this how can one question the importance of discussing hate crimes while he is out there talking about that being gay is a sin, that it's a sickness, that it's a psychological disorder."

Aside from a few naysayers, the reaction so far has been overwhelmingly positive.

"Some people are thrilled that we get to show that comics aren't just about fisticuffs and flying into space," Winick says. "And a lot of folks are happy that we get to put this social issue out there again and to be able to discuss it in this medium."

One of Winick's other writing jobs is

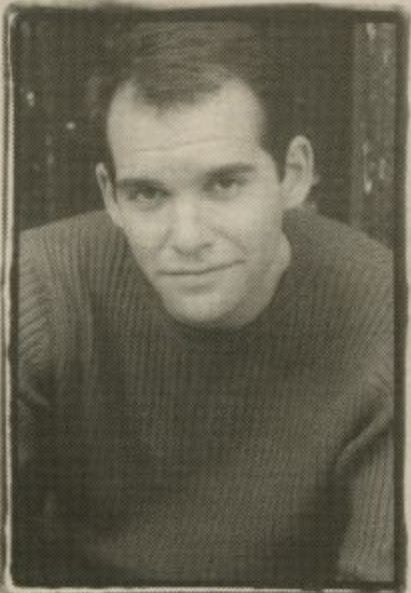
for Marvel Comics on *Exiles*, a comic that deals with dimension-hopping superhero mutants. One of the team's heroines is Sunfire, a young lesbian, but the reaction to her has hardly been noticeable.

"Our predominantly male fan base is probably more comfortable, even titillated, with lesbians around. Maybe it is because she is a superhero and it puts her at an even greater distance," says Winick. "With Terry, he is a 17-year-old gay male, which could easily be any one of them or someone they know. Maybe it hits a little too close to home."

Eight years after the world got to know him in a personal way, Judd Winick realizes that things can change

in the real world and so can people.

"I'm eight years older now...and a little balder. The woman I share my life with is now my wife. I am no longer the hard working cartoonist who is trying to find a job and a date," he says. "Both of those things are pretty well taken care of, thank you very much." ❖



Older, wiser, "and a little balder," JUDD WINICK has the "write" stuff to tackle gay issues.

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