

# MADMAN

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the other superheroes.

Allred recently signed a deal with Columbia-Tri Star to write a screenplay based on the first three issues of the *Madman* series. The film is now in pre-production and British actor Malcolm McDowell is set to play the main bad guy, Mr. Monstadt. Allred said Kyle MacLachlan of *Twin Peaks* is interested in playing Madman.

Allred, 30, said he's always wanted to be involved in filmmaking. But the road to Hollywood has been a most unusual one, with stops everywhere from Roseburg to Germany and work in fields from broadcasting to sculpture.

Allred read comic books as a young boy growing up in Roseburg, and he also developed a penchant for drawing early in life. Even then, he followed his own path.

"I've never really been helped with art classes," he said. "In fact, in junior high, my art teacher would have the class doing some projects and then he just stuck me over on a easel and let me do

what I wanted."

The interest in drawing waned a little as he got older, and Allred went on to study broadcasting in college. He wanted to develop his interests in music and movies, although he continued his artwork and began sculpting.

Allred wrote his first screenplay, *Dead Air*, during that time. The screenplay, in which the residents of Roseburg think a nuclear war has begun, hasn't been filmed yet.

A friend who was interested in comic books then suggested that Allred combine his writing and drawing skills.

"He started giving me comic books that were worth a lot of money, which made me feel obligated to read them," Allred said. "And somewhere along the line I read that comics were the poor man's film medium, and that inspired me to go ahead and try to draw my screenplay."

The first thing Allred had published was a graphic novel version of *Dead Air*. (A comic book is traditionally a magazine with about 30 pages. A graphic novel is thicker, with more than 100 pages, and is geared toward a larger audience, although the concept is the same as a comic book.)

"I thought it would just be one thing I did so I'd have something on a bookshelf," Allred said. "But after I did it, I wasn't really satisfied, so I started doing it more."

By the late 1980s, Allred had begun a two-year stint working at a radio station in Germany. But he continued his work with comic books.

"It got to where my comic books were earning me more money than broadcasting," Allred said. "So I moved back to Oregon, and my comic book career has just kind of progressed since then."

That's something of an understatement. He began devoting himself full time to comic book work in January, 1990, and within the last year, *Madman* became one of the best sellers for Tundra, an independent comic book publishing house started by Kevin Eastman, who created *The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*.

Allred has also done work for Marvel and D.C. Comics. Marvel has called on him to create, among other things, comic books based on a character called The Everyman. And D.C. recently asked him to work on some projects, including *The Geek*, *Doom Patrol* and a *Batman* series. Some of those he writes and some he draws.

But *Madman*, as Allred said, "is all mine." He owns the rights to the character and the stories — one of the benefits of working for an independent company, Allred said.

*Madman* was created out of Allred's frustration that a series he wrote called *Graphic Music* wasn't really going anywhere.

"With *Graphic Music*, it was about a lot of different things, it was also a very ambiguous title and it lacked one central, iconic image," Allred said. "With *Madman*, I thought I could have a little fun. I wanted to strike a balance between what I could have fun with and really enjoy doing but would also have some market potential."

*Madman* has since been published all over the world in four languages. Allred said he gets letters from as far away as New Zealand and Ireland. One of his most famous fans is Robin Williams, who wore a *Madman* t-shirt on the last "Comic Relief" special.

Ann Eagan, director of promotions for Tundra, said one of the reasons *Madman* is successful is because readers can put themselves into the story.

"The character is like a blank slate, like an 'Everyman,'" Eagan said. "His personality isn't fully formed, he doesn't really know who he is, so the reader can get into it. That's the sign of a good comic book, if the reader can get into it. And Mike has a good sense of pace and storytelling."

Eagan said Allred's progress has been impressive and she's excited about his future.

"He's very talented," she said. "If you look at his progress, especially when you consider that it's been interrupted with other things like sculpting, it's amazing. He just keeps getting better."

Last summer, when Allred was at a comic book convention, a representative from Columbia-Tri Star picked up a *Madman* book and gave it to his boss, who asked Allred to write a screenplay.

Allred co-wrote it with local novelist Kevin Welch. It's been optioned by the studio, which has 16 months to make the movie before the rights revert back to Allred. If that happens, he's free to sell it to another studio.

Allred's contract is unusual for a first-time screenwriter. He's not only the film's co-producer, but has cast and crew approval as well.

In the story, the audience meets Madman, who's not sure who he is. But Madman knows that another man, who he saw get hit by a car, knows who Madman really is. The last words of the dying man, Dr. Boiffard, are that Madman should find Dr. Flem, who can bring Dr. Boiffard back to life. Madman runs into all kinds of unsavory characters on his quest, including Mr. Monstadt.

Although Allred hopes *Madman* will be made into a movie soon, he's trying to remain realistic.

"I've heard horror stories about movies even being shot and then having the plug pulled on them, so I'll believe it when I see it on the screen," he said.

Allred, who is married and has two young sons, is now working on various comic books and he and Welch plan to write other screenplays together. But the excitement over the possibility of a *Madman* movie is obvious.

As Eagan puts it, "The way we're looking at it, the comic book's doing great and it will continue to do great, with or without the movie, but if the movie hits..."



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