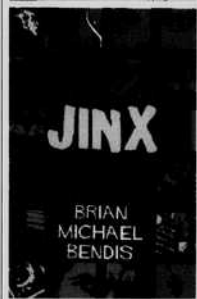


WHEN BRIAN MICHAEL Bendis was 5, he drew a picture of Spider-Man of which he was very proud. Naturally, he immediately wanted to show it off to his father. But instead of promptly posting the drawing on the fridge, Papa Bendis felt compelled to question Spidey's curiously distorted anatomy. Why was one arm so much bigger than the other? "'Cause," Bendis huffed, "that's where he keeps his webs!" He then stomped off.

"That," laughs Bendis, "was the precursor for a lot of my career."

In fact, Bendis' theme song could be Frank Sinatra's "My Way," since doing it his way has paid off in spades. The fast-talking Cleveland-based writer/artist has emerged as one of the most distinctive voices in comics—a purveyor of critically acclaimed crime fiction that marks him as the funny-pages descendant of Sam Fuller, Martin Scorsese, and Quentin Tarantino. Bendis' hyper-stylized panels flow like movie scenes. The dialogue is effusively naturalistic, and the black-and-white art is so inky, it all but stains your fingers.

Come fall, this Renoir of noir brings his hard-boiled style of storytelling to Marvel Comics' *Spider-Man* (Mark Bagley and Art Thibert will handle the drawing). Though his work to date has been decidedly adult, Bendis swears he can do adolescence: "I haven't really written anything from my teenage neuroses yet," says Bendis, 33, who was "roughly the size of a Smurf" until age 17. "But [the neuroses] I got are definitely in the realm of what's



FRAME GRABBER
Bendis and baby



Hard-Boiled Egghead

By setting his vividly noir tales at the dark end of the street, comics auteur BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS proves that crime *does* pay. BY JEFF JENSEN