



required for Peter Parker."

Bendis grew up in the suburbs of Cleveland, a city that spawned such other comic greats as *Superman* cocreator Joe Shuster and artist P. Craig Russell. "There's really nothing to do here, so we all stayed home and drew comics," says Bendis, who in grade school marked up his textbooks with doodles of Marvel superheroes and in high school vowed to make a living by the pen. But the art-school dropout says he found his comics muse in the movies. *Visions of Light*, a 1993 documentary on cinematographers—particularly a segment on film noir featuring revered *Citizen Kane* director of photography Gregg Toland—inspired his art style. David Mamet's *House of Games* and especially Scorsese's *The Color of Money*, tales of small-time crooks and twisty confidence scams, set the scene for the stories he wanted to tell.

Cleveland's mean streets moved him, too. "I went from nice Jewish boy in

suburbia to living on my own in what would only be considered a terrible neighborhood," says Bendis. "I was robbed for the first time. I was meeting interesting people. My world was opening up." He proudly claims to have interviewed real-life con artists and bounty hunters for his breakthroughs: *Goldfish*, from Image Comics, in which an ex-grifter returns to Cleveland's underbelly for some big-time vengeance and redemption, and its prequel, *Jinx*. "I watched two guys work a three-card monte racket on a city bus and make \$500 in the span of one stop," says Bendis. "I said, 'That's a rush I want to duplicate in comics.'" A more bookish sort of research informed the masterful *Torso*, a true-crime tale about a post-*Untouchables* Eliot Ness chasing a serial killer. (Both *Goldfish* and *Torso* were optioned by Miramax but are currently in turnaround. Bendis chronicled his surreal Hollywood experience in the hilarious comics memoir *Fortune*

and *Glory*, published by Oni Press.)

"Bendis is the Mamet of modern comics," says celebrated comics scribe Warren Ellis (DC's *Transmetropolitan*). "He writes about people we want to like, who are funny and touching—but there are very few chinks of light in these tight, noir-y stories. We like listening to these people. We don't want them to get hurt. That's what makes his work compelling."

With *Spider-Man*—which sticks to the wall-crawler's mythic origins but modernizes the cultural context (expect World Wide Web references)—Bendis says he's entering his "mainstream comics writer phase." But Bendis hasn't given up on crime fiction; he's currently writing two monthly titles, *Sam and Twitch* and *Powers*, both for Image. Plus, he's got an animated version of *Jinx* running on his award-winning website, [jinxworld.com](http://jinxworld.com). "The adult in me is still doing adult work," says Bendis. "But the 12-year-old in me is high-fiving himself." ●●●