

# Author/Illustrator Spotlight on

## Eric Shanower

By Grace Nall

A workaholic graphic novelist. The *Oz* Comic Series. *The Age of Bronze*. Put it all together and what do you get? Award-winning and *New York Times* bestselling cartoonist, author, and illustrator, Eric Shanower.

It all began with his parents reading the Sunday comics to him. "I started reading *Tintin's* adventures—or, rather, having them read to me—when I was five years old," says Shanower. "I was aware of comic books and still own the first one I ever received, a comics adaptation of Disney's *Bambi* movie. Actually, buying my first comic book at 7-Eleven, an issue of *Casper*, started an addiction that has never stopped."

At six years old, Shanower discovered the *Oz* books by L. Frank Baum. Soon, a colossal turn of events turned fantasy into reality. "I became enamored with the *Oz* books to such an extent that they became a major part of my life," says Shanower.

"Certainly they're full of adventure and humor, with fascinating characters and a matter-of-fact approach to the odd and fantastic. I'm sure the illustrations by John R. Neill for the *Oz* books also had a lot to do with my attraction to them."

After high school, Shanower attended and graduated from the Joe Kubert School of Cartoon and Graphic Art in Dover, New Jersey. "I was inking Steve Rude's pencils on the comic book, *Nexus*," stated Shanower, "but I didn't want to be simply an inker on someone else's project, I wanted to write and draw my own comics."

If there ever was a writer's theme park in the works, Shanower's life takes on one adventure after another. Follow him along the Yellow Brick Road with cartoonist Skottie Young and you'll come across his *Oz* series, an adaptation of L. Frank Baum's classic *Oz* books. Take the Trojan War exhibition and you'll battle a Bronze Age experience!

Shanower, 48, has pages of credits to his name. He has won several *Will Eisner Comics Industry Awards* for *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Marvel Comics), including Best Adaptation from Another Work, Best Publication for Kids, and Best Limited Series or Story Arc. Besides comics and graphic novels, Shanower's talents are found in magazines, advertising, non-sport trading cards, conventions, newsletters, apparel designs, Christmas card designs, and publications outside North America.

He has trekked through publishing journeys ranging from co-founding Hungry Tiger Press to self-publishing books. "There's not much challenge to getting a book printed on paper ... (or) printed digitally," says Shanower. "The challenge comes in getting the book noticed and into the hands of readers. A self-publisher needs an effective marketing plan and the time and energy to implement the plan."

Shanower stays ahead of the game by keeping his finger on the pulse of the publishing industry. His *Age of Bronze* series is available as a digital app for the iPad. Even with all his accomplishments, Shanower's advice is to not let your career consume your life. "...I often swim (in the) mornings," says Shanower. "Then deal with email and Facebook...work on whatever job or jobs is facing me...breaks for meals... Then, read a little before bed."

As for writing, he leans toward plotting first. "I'll write an outline of the action," says Shanower. "But for stories that I'm just making up myself, I try to keep only a gentle hold of the plot so that while I'm writing the story, the characters are free to move in whatever direction they will. For stories that I'm adapting from elsewhere, the plot has to stay the same, so I have the challenge of coercing reluctant characters into keeping to the plot. Usually that means fixing how I'm presenting a character or a character's thoughts."

Shanower describes his "most intensive research" stemming from his comic book series, *Age of Bronze: The Story of the Trojan War*. "The project has required researching both the tradition of the Troy story—not just in writing, but in art and performance, too—and the archaeology of the Late Bronze Age Aegean world," stated Shanower. "This has led me to some really interesting experiences, meeting archaeologists and classicists, and traveling to Troy in Turkey and Bronze Age sites in Greece. I go to libraries and museums whenever I can." Visit Eric Shanower's website for more information at [www.ericshanower.com](http://www.ericshanower.com).



Photo by David Maxine

Eric Shanower amid his many projects.