

## Alien Smugglers and Bounty Hunters in the Sci-Fi Comic 'Runners'

Sean Wang

by [Kat Avila](#)

"I'm kind of a workaholic by necessity," says Sean Wang, creator of the sci-fi adventure comic **Runners**. "The comic must come out more regularly. Basically, I work 40 hours at **Cyberlore Studios** [a computer game company] and then another 40 hours on my comic. It's not a healthy thing to do for very long stretches, but it's something I have to do for now in order to get the book out. And even at that pace, it's not coming out nearly as regularly as I'd like."

However, his dedication resulted in the completion of the first story arc "Bad Goods"; the last issue of that arc (issue #5) was released in February. He started working on the comic in 1994-1995, with a long gestation period between writing the story and drawing the first page. A diverse alien crew of smugglers play cat-and-mouse with handsome pirates, double-dealing bounty hunters, and the Oniaka City police. You may be familiar with **Runners: Bad Goods #1** as Sean Wang was a silver sponsor of Free Comic Book Day this past May 7th; the free remastered issue did really well for him.

**Runners** will be continuing with issue #6. The next story arc, or one-story mini-series, will be four to five issues. He likes the idea of sequential numbering so you know the order of things. Wang would like to get a couple issues ready before releasing again in order to put out his comic on a fixed schedule.

He has been in Artists' Alley at Comic-Con International for the past four years. I met Sean Wang there in 2004. He caught my eye with his impressive cover for **Runners: Bad Goods #3**, which was of Roka's huge interstellar freighter Khoruysa Brimia under attack by three smaller uncloaked rogue ships. (His architecture degree from MIT wasn't wasted after all.) Wang does four to five major conventions a year and a number of smaller local ones.

Major influences on his work include the original *Star Wars* trilogy and **The Lord of the Rings**. About *Star Wars*, Wang commented in another interview (Avila, **JADE Magazine**, May 2005), "I loved the space opera feel and the cool ships and alien designs. Surprisingly, that kind of story never seemed to find a place in comics, which is one of the reasons I started doing **Runners**, to fill that void."

**Runners** is self-published under the name **Serve Man Press**. Its comical logo is a gaping V-toothed alien with a bib on who is holding a knife and fork in each hand. Wang's inspiration was the shocking **Twilight Zone** episode "To Serve Man," where it's belatedly discovered as Earthlings are boarding alien spaceships that the title of an alien tome **To Serve Man** has been mistranslated; the book isn't about service to humanity, but about serving up Earthlings as the main course.

Sean Wang worked for an architecture firm for three years while he was trying to break into comics. He used to work on New England Comics' **The Tick** and **The Tick and Arthur** based on Ben Edlund's original series.

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**Sequential Tart:** *What do you remember about **The Tick**?*

**Sean Wang:** It was a lot of fun, and as my first comic gig, it was a great opportunity since I was allowed to be both writer and artist on the books. At the time, I had already developed my **Runners** series, which is an action comedy. So when I

got sidetracked working on **The Tick**, it was actually pretty nice since the feel of the book as a comedy adventure wasn't too far off from what I was doing with **Runners**.

After working on **The Tick** for a few years, I ended my run in 1999, although I continued to do covers for them for a number of years. I decided I wanted to get back to my **Runners** book, and after going to a number of small press shows, I realized that self-publishing might be a feasible way of getting the book out there.



**Sean Wang at Comic-Con 2005**  
photo by Kat Avila

**ST:** *How are your marketing efforts for **Runners**?*

**SW:** I'm doing a good amount of marketing, but there's always a lot more you could be doing. Typically, I send out a lot of press releases whenever I have something new, and I send the book out to reviewers and comic sites. The whole marketing and promotion thing is a necessity that self-publishers have to do. But to be honest, I wish I didn't have to do it, so I could put all my time and energy into the actual production of the book.

**ST:** *What is your next story arc about?*

**SW:** I don't have the next arc fully fleshed out just yet. It's still in progress. But I have a lot of the key events and broad arcs to the epic planned out. I'm just now sorting out the details of the individual story arcs, which I find to be a nice way to work. That way, I have the broader, more general arcs in place, but have a little bit of fluidity in the storytelling and development of the smaller arcs.

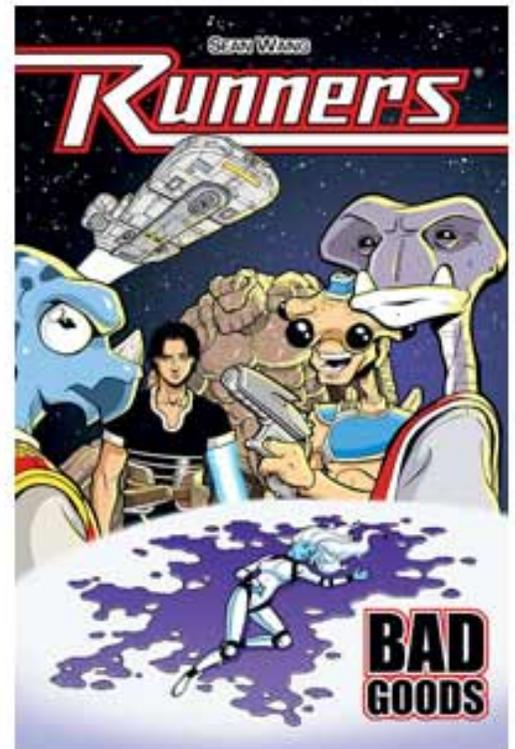
**ST:** **Runners** is presently an all-ages comic. Maybe some

*T&A would increase sales?*

**SW:** I actually don't think of **Runners** as an all-ages book, although it certainly currently is. I prefer to not target any specific audience in terms of not trying to write for a mature audience or trying to write for kids. That kind of writing just seems dangerous to me since you're always second-guessing yourself to try to view your writing through the filter of your audience. I'd rather just write the kind of story I would like to read myself and hopefully it'll appeal to others as well. In general though, tone-wise, I'd say **The Lord of the Rings** is my benchmark. That didn't have any really graphic violence or sex, but still had some adult themes and intensity. It was accessible to people of all ages without talking down to anyone.

**ST:** *Grissom is my favorite character. She's a lone fighter with a scarred face and a broken horn, but she is still incredibly beautiful nonetheless. Interesting forehead tattoo. You originally designed Grissom as a male alien [see end of issue #2 for original designs]. Was coming up with the final character design for her the most difficult one to do?*

**SW:** It's been pretty difficult across the board to design all of the characters. Grissom went through probably the biggest revision, but for all of them, I wanted to end up with a design that was truly alien while still being capable of conveying emotions through facial expressions and body language.



**Runners Trade Paperback**  
© Sean Wang

**ST:** *In the last of three articles you wrote for e-zine **Broken***

**Frontier** about your creative process, you said you use a type of page and panel composition that focuses on story over art. The less elaborate "Jeff Smith style" over the "Chris Bachalo style," as you put it. Do you see yourself more as a storyteller than as an artist? Are you too much a technician to become more experimental?

**SW:** I wouldn't say it's a focus of story over art since the story *IS* the art as well. It's more the approach to page layout that I was talking about. With the Jeff Smith style, the page is broken into traditional panels separated by gutters, with the emphasis being on what's going on inside the panels. With the Chris Bachalo style, the whole page is a piece of art where often the panels overlap and are adorned with embellishments. While I really like that look, I just find it easier to focus on the storytelling and flow of the story with the other style.

**ST:** *How did you get involved with Free Comic Book Day?*

**SW:** Free Comic Book Day is a great way to get new people reading comics and is also a great way for long-time comic readers to try something new.

Late last year I just made the decision to do something for FCBD. I knew I'd be coming out with my **Runners** trade paperback in mid-2005, so I wanted to offer a reprint of my first issue for FCBD so people could sample the series before the collected volume came out. It seems to have worked as the FCBD issue was extremely well received and considered by some to be one of the better books offered this year.

**ST:** *What do you like to read?*

**SW:** I liked **Bone** a lot. **The Goon** and **Hellboy** are fun books. **Daisy Kutter**, **Street Angel**, **Flight**. In general I pick up a lot of random titles, both mainstream and indie, if the art appeals to me.

Generally I like bold graphic art with a cartoony edge and clean lines. A lot of artists do a lot of feathering and cross-

hatching, and a lot of them can do it well, but with a lot of books that kind of style starts to look overly busy and cluttered.

**ST:** *What artists do you admire in particular?*

**SW:** I guess all the artists from the books I mentioned above. I also like artists like Steve McNiven, Adam Hughes, Dean Yeagle, Greg Land, Frank Cho, Kevin Maguire, Masamune Shirow, Lewis Trondheim, to name just a few.



**Runners alien sketchbook designs**  
© Sean Wang

**ST:** *Have you considered releasing **Runners** in graphic novel form, instead of by issue?*

**SW:** The first story arc of **Runners** is now finished and will be coming out as a trade paperback on August 31. It does seem like more and more people are considering going straight to graphic novel with their books, and I've considered it as well. But I still like single issues, and it's a good way of keeping the series out there for long stretches between collections. So, for the time being, I'll be continuing with the single issues. But, in the meantime, be on the lookout for the **Runners: Bad Goods** trade paperback!

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[Sean Wang](#) — the official web site

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