

HELLION FOR HIRE #8: MEMORIES OF SAN DIEGO, 2006

by Billy Tucci
July 27, 2006

It's Wednesday following the San Diego Comic Con (or Comic Con International, San Diego) and I'm friggin' bushed. Of course it's approaching midnight, and this column is late because my new iBook arrived while I was on the left coast. Hence, I couldn't write up my weekly memoir on the plane ride home like I planned. It's not so bad really (but I *really* need a beer), due to the fact that I'm tapping away before one badass 20-inch monitor on this smoking new iMac. So without further ado, let's recount shall we?



The plan was simple. My wife Deborah and I, accompanied by our sons, William, 3 and Matthew, 3 months would be joined by our sister-in-law Christine and her two children, Andrew 7 and Emily, 2 (Comic Con virgins all) on Tuesday. Here I would go in early and set up the booth display while the moms and kids had lunch. After setting up I would go upstairs to the room to finish up a page while Deb set up the booth and Christine watched the kids poolside. On Thursday, Debi's younger sister Lauren, 21 would also be joining us to alternate with Debi on both booth and family duty.

All went according to plan to San Diego on Tuesday, Christine's and her children had a nightmare of a time with cancelled flights and didn't show up until Thursday afternoon. This was bad the damn airline screw up collided with the fact that it was now up to me to watch my sons while my wife Deborah set up the booth - not the greatest idea and more on my babysitting debacle and almost murdering William later.



Thankfully, our good friend Mike Solof ("Uncle Mike") showed up just in time to help Debi set up and then relieve me before I went postal. Mike pretty much sacrificed his Wednesday and crucial parts of the rest of the con to help out at the booth. Though I did pay for it in the end when he shot me in the head with Indiana Jones' 38. caliber revolver.

What also helped was the fact that the con had babysitting services which after much kicking and screaming was happily accepted by the darling William on Thursday.

Location, location, location!

This year we had the greatest booth location, number 1801 with two end caps and right slap dab in front of the center entrance hall! Knowing a good thing when we see it, we booked the same

spot for next year in hopes that the floor plan stays the same. I heard that this year's show boasted about 150,000 attendees (can anyone verify this?) and I believe it as the smell was well, unbearable (and you know who you are don't you?). So much so, that Lauren, (a SDCC pro since age 13) got really pissed at me after I sent her to the Marvel booth Thursday afternoon. Needless to say, Lauren hates smelly people, never made it to Marvel and refused to leave the Crusade booth on the days she worked. But aside from the stinkers, the attendees were simply terrific as the SDCC is like one giant reunion of fans and creators.

Speaking of being a fan of creators, I had the privilege of meeting one of my boyhood idols of illustration Basil Gogos. Best known for his awe-inspiring painted covers of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* and countless action magazines, Mr. Gogos, is truly a legend that has wowed millions of readers and inspired thousands of illustrators. I also got the chance to chat in detail with the great Jim Steranko. I always seem to luck out late in the evenings of conventions and bump into Mr. Steranko in the lobby of our hotel. There joined by J. David Spurlock and Atomic Comics owner, (and softballer) Mike Malve, Jim talked with us of storytelling and art way into the wee hours.

On Friday the wow factor was pushed up a bit as my Black Cat Model Heather Harris showed up at my booth amid dozen flashbulbs. Heather slithered over a chair holding up Mark Sparacio's painted **Heroes for Hire #3** cover art to the delight of little (and not so little) boys everywhere - now that's advertising if I ever saw!



I also had a blast with my 7 year-old-nephew Andrew who experienced his first comic convention ever. We both bought tons of stuff and battled throughout the week with our light-sabers (his Luke Skywalker's, mine Obi Wan Kenobi's) by the Marriott pool, lobby, hallways, elevators, and restaurants. Damn fine battles they were too!

The rest of the con days were a blur, as the record crowd kept us all busy by graciously visiting our humble booth amid the endless panels and signings. I want to sincerely thank all who did stop by, as I know all that there is to see and how valuable your time is. I will get more detailed on you and the time we all had at the Crusade booth next week.



Sunday afternoon too was overwhelming, as aside from Saturday it seemed to be the busiest day of the Con. Mark Sparacio and I joined artist extraordinaire' Humberto Ramos at the Marvel booth for a signing that it was just crazy. There had to be a couple hundred people in line who patiently waited amid the heat for a sketch and a smile. I had stopped by several times during the show and it seemed like the Marvel booth was always in a state of controlled chaos. My special thanks to

softball heroes (oh yeah, we'll get to that soon enough) Mike Pasciullo, John Dokes and their crew for the wonderful invite and keeping order while also keeping the attendees happy.

William, William, WILLIAM!

Working the show seemed like a piece of cake compared to watching my maniacal son William. We both got off to a great start as while Debi and Solof were setting up the booth, I had him at the Marriott pool. Well to make a long story short, the boy swam to and ran out of the opposite side of the pool, where he took off up the stairs and bolted to nowhere. Terrified, I searched high and low for 10 minutes before fellow hotel guests and employees all casually pointed out the fact that they watched a three-year old child in a padded swimsuit open the pool gate, dart across the parking lot and make his way down the boardwalk and onto the docks. One even mentioned that he was led away by some woman! After nineteen heart attacks, I found him cheerfully yelling for me to join him and look at the ducks. I was so happy that I couldn't kill him, but it was one Herculean effort not to go back to the con and return with one of our collectible cabanas and murder "I could give a shit" adult who just stood by as the boy ran off. I don't care if you're worried about being sued by putting your hands on a child running out of a hotel or store, but **please do**; it's better than the alternative.

Then I almost got arrested on Thursday night while waiting for an ambulance, that's right, the little shit wasn't done with his tomfoolery. Earlier in the evening, William somehow managed to scrape the cornea of his eye with the ribbon to his con badge. He was screaming something awful and we had the hotel call the ambulance. Well, it took over 30 minutes for it to come and again, I was throwing a conniption when learning that the hotel manager "didn't want to frighten" this screaming child who can't open his eyes with the ambulance's emergency lights and sirens. As you can imagine, it was one stressed out ordeal which William finally got eye drops to numb his eye (after waiting another 2 hours in the ER) and us back to the hotel at 4:30 am. Thank the Lord he'll be all right and just needs eye drops for a couple of weeks to be right as rain.



Oh but that's not all that happened is it? Saturday he went to the zoo and managed to trip over something he wasn't supposed to be on and busted open his left eye (same one as the scratch). Blood everywhere and his two aunties having breakdowns in the 102-degree heat wave. And of course, last but not least, was the railing flip. It was Monday afternoon when the boy decided to take a somersault off a walkway railing at our hotel and into a rocky pond. Once again, a busted left eye, blood everywhere and one of his parents wanting to kill him. If it weren't for the aforementioned padded training bathing suit he probably would have broken his neck. I was bitching to my good buddy Beau Smith (who was unable to attend do to family commitments) about all the shit we went through when he flatly replied, "That's what you get for bringing your kid on a business trip dickhead!"

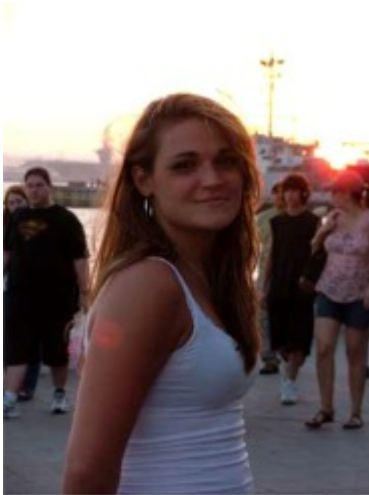
One tequila, two tequila, three tequila - floor!

Like many a con the food and drink was a flowin.' Because I missed all of Tuesday because Deb was setting up while I watched the kids, I spent Wednesday and Thursday nights working on my Marvel pages (when not in the hospital). By Friday, I really needed to get out. So after putting the kids to bed (and watching *Over the Hedge*) I snuck out of the room to meet Lauren and Christine (the little minx showing off her new tattoo) at the Hyatt for a drink. The place was a madhouse

(and too damn loud) but shared some great conversation and laughs with friends (congrats on you Eisner, John Cassidy!) and a bunch of my victorious Marvel softball teammates (I promise more on that later). Eventually, we were unceremoniously kicked out but the party refused to end. Outside the girls and I spent the wee hours of the morning with Jimmy Palmiotti and Mike Pasciullo and witnessed some dude pass out and was taken away in an ambulance accompanied by a fire truck lights flashing and sirens wailing for sure - Don't get me started. One a personal note, if the said dude who passed out is reading this, we're all glad you didn't die.

Saturday's Con day was simply a madhouse. I've honestly never seen so many people in one place in my life, but did manage to get away from all the wonderful insanity and spend a pipe-smoked evening with my good home-town friends, screenwriter Steven Peros, his brother Mike and film composer Christopher Caliendo. We were joined for some fine Greek food, drinks and cigars by Joe Kuhr, Dennis Bartok (writer producer of "Trapped Ashes" a *Tales of the Crypt* type anthology horror film debuting at this year's prestigious Toronto International Film Festival), Tom Cohen, and a good chap named Mark (who's last name I unfortunately cannot recall). We eventually ended up at "Dick's Last Resort" which was thankfully dead as everyone seemed to be back at the Hyatt for more noise.

My wife Deborah *loves* tequila, she loves it so much that she actually *likes* me when she drinks tequila. So it was a wonderful surprise when my good buddy John Taddeo and his wife Donna gave Deb and I a very nice present in the form of liquid agave. Aside from creating, writing and publishing **Zoom Suit** John owns a high-end brand of tequila aptly named "Voodoo Tiki" which is made up 100 % pure agave, (the plant the stuff comes from and is aged at least eight years) before being harvested. Check out www.voodooTiki.com for the best damn tequila you can buy bar none that comes in several flavors (Blanco, Blue Dragon, Green Dragon, Desert Rose and Reposado). My favorite however is the Anejo which I believe is aged twelve-years. What's really unique about Voodoo Tiki (aside from the taste) is the fact that certain flavors (Blanco, Anejo, Reposado) come complete with it's own Tiki idol made of hand-blown glass. An idol that holds a good (or evil) spirit that guides you through an evening of getting all banged-up the Mexican way.



Capping off the post show entertainment was the wonderful (and quite spur of the moment) Chinese dinner with good friends followed by an annual party hosted by Bob and Gina Chapman of Graffiti Designs on Sunday night. Christine and the kids had an early flight back to New York and Debi was tired so it was up to Lauren and myself to represent. Holy crap, I haven't done that many shots or been that hung over since...well, last year's Graffiti party.

Their Finest Hour

But of course the true highlight of the Con for me was Thursday afternoon and the first annual Marvel vs. DC softball game. Staged at Balboa Park the game was the brainchild of Jim McLauchlin and benefiting ACTOR (A Commitment To Our Roots). Being only a short term Marvelite I was psyched to be invited to this very prestigious (and very competitive) war for a good cause. Within the dust of the baseball diamond, we experienced bruised shoulders, pulled hamstrings pulled and more mother jokes thrown than pitches, as Marvel opened one giant can whup ass on their cross-town rivals. Damon Nee, Axel Alonso, Mark McKenna and captain Mike Marts led the all-star cast that seized the day for the house of ideas.

The final "official" score was 22-11 (though it was really 22-10) as a Marvel roster boasting such studs as John Romita Jr, Tony Bedard, Bob Sabouni, CB Cebulski, Dennis Calero, Esad Ribic, (shirtless and cigarette toting maniac) Frank Mastromauro, Greg Pak, Humberto Ramos, Jeff Parker, Jim Calafiore, John Dokes, Logan Lubera, Mark Brooks, Mitch Breitweiser, Robert Kirkman, Andy Schmidt and big Mike Pasciullo forced the DC home team's refusal to return for their final at bats. Okay, maybe it was the bus drivers bitching about the time, but regardless, Yours Truly pitched 3 innings, allowing 5 runs while going 3 for 3 with two singles, a triple, 2 runs scored and 2 RBIs. Not too shabby.



All should send a heartfelt thanks Mike Malve, and Shawn Kirkham. Marvelite Mike (\$860.00) and DC Shawn's (\$1325.00) generous eBay bidding brought in much appreciated capital to ACTOR, and a great presence to the field. Shawn was a madman at the plate being named MVP of the DC team after going 2-2 with 5 RBIs!



My sincere thanks to Dan Didio and the entire DC team for such a tough game as shown by Jann Jones' shaking off a line drive to the back by Mike Marts that would put any ordinary pitcher down! Also an appreciated shout out to John Dokes and Mike Pasciullo for scoring such great jerseys for the team and Dan Buckley and Joe Quesada giving their squad the go ahead even when the Civil War panel wouldn't allow themselves to play.

Of course none of this would have happened had it not been for Jim McLauchlin, who not only organized the whole shebang but also umpired like a pro! Though I still think he was a little tough on those inside calls!

Rumor is that the game was such a success there's a chance next year's will be played at PETCO Park, home of the San Diego Padres! Let's cross our fingers and show up in mass for

<http://www.newsarama.com/general/Hellion/08/Hellion8.html>

such a worthy cause. Again, it truly was a privilege playing at all and I hope to be invited back next year. I better get faster on my deadlines and start selling some books!

Well, it's literally back to the drawing board and I though I had one wonderful time at Comic Con, couldn't be happier to be back home!

Tally Ho and wait till you hear what I traded some "Shi" lithographs for next week! In the coming weeks, the wordsmith's behind "Heroes For Hire," variant covers and you won't believe who's gonna model for me! Yeah Baby!

Billy

Discussion Thread: <http://forum.newsarama.com/showthread.php?t=78448>

dgmagill

07-27-2006 10:25 AM

I'm usually not that interested in booth babes, but seeing that picture of Heather as the Black Cat would have made me stop and stare, too. :D

Congrats on the successful con (although I agree with Beau - leave the kids at home, especially the little hellion!). Now get back to work so we can enjoy more issues of Heroes for Hire! ;)

DGM

Billy Tucci

07-27-2006 10:43 AM

Quote:

Originally Posted by **dgmagill**

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DGM

I'm back I'm back! But I was hoping to be the first to post due to some mistakes. This isn't Hellion #8 it's #7 and last week was titled SDCC 1993-1997 though I only covered the con up to '96'. Will be back on track with Comic Con memories 1997-2006 next week.

Heather is indeed a hottie, ain't she?

:cool:

Billy Tucci

07-27-2006 11:14 AM

Actually this is Hellion #8 the following were:

- #1 - Matt's interview with me
- #2 - My studio tour
- #3 - Marvel Offices
- #4 - Tom Palmer's Interview
- #5 - Marte's Interview
- #6 - Mark Sparacio's Interview
- #7 - Memories of SDCC Part 1 1993-97
- #8 - SDCC 2006 Recap

Okay, so I'm not going insane... yet!

Delgado

07-27-2006 11:35 AM

the Marvel/DC game was a blast! it was fun to finally meet you there Bill, although i tried and i tried to get to your booth to chat some more, but the convention was crazy and i was swallowed by it... is it getting bigger each year?

anyway, nice to meet you even if it was a "hi man how's it going, i gotta go back to the game!"

Jimmy Palmiotti

07-27-2006 12:02 PM

man, this story was so much fun i wished i was there....wait, i was.

damn you tequila!!!

was great hanging out with billy and the crew. Debbie and Lauren are my two favorite people ...and i like billy , but that pipe makes me gag!

just got the color lettered proofs of heroes for hire one...amazing job billy.....:)

Billy Tucci

07-27-2006 12:45 PM

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Jimmy Palmiotti**

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just got the color lettered proofs of heroes for hire one...amazing job billy....:)

Thanks Jimmy, I think #2's looking even better. Feel I've finally got a good grip on the characters.

Billy Tucci

07-27-2006 12:45 PM

Oh I think I've got a picture of you with my pipe somewhere!

Billy Tucci

07-27-2006 12:46 PM

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Delgado**

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anyway, nice to meet you even if it was a "hi man how's it going, i gotta go back to the game!"

It was great finally meeting you to my friend!

slI01

07-27-2006 01:17 PM

In reference to the photo at the top with the pipe.
Is that some Gray hair I see sneaking in there Billy?
Kids will do that to ya.
It sounds like a crazy con next year for sure.
I wonder if Heather will be in Chicago!

MarkSparacio

07-27-2006 01:42 PM

HELLION FOR HIRE 8: SAN DIEGO MEMORIES, 2006

Hey Billy, another highly interesting column to say the least... After reading about William, Erin will be bringing the duct tape and rope next year, of that you can be sure. I guess I'll be the first to publicly state it: This is a little payback for what I am sure you did to your Mom. Sorry, Mrs.Tucci.

All kidding aside, I am glad to hear that William is doing okay, it is really tough watching little guys at home(I've done that with my own boys), I can't imagine the craziness at a convention.

If there is anybody out there reading this column who wasn't at SDCC this year(I'm sure that there aren't many), Billy's column is right on the mark, it was absolutely insane. There was just soooo much going on and the place was just packed. When I was at my booth and it got crowded (which was quite often, Thanks to everybody who stopped by!) you could actually feel the temperature start to rise. I am not kidding. Then when Heather Harris, dressed as the Black Cat came over, it was like a sauna. And when Jimmy Palmiotti stopped by, holy crap, the temperature dropped and it became really comfortable again. I don't know why...hmmm...

I would like to say "Thanks!" again to all the great people who stopped by my booth. I am really and truly flattered. I'd like to give a BIG shout out to all the great guys at the Marvel booth who made Humberto, Billy and myself feel very comfortable while at the signing and especially to all the people who stood on line(one guy told me he was waiting for an hour and twenty minutes!) for signatures and prints. I hope to see you all again next year and Billy and I will see you next week as we'll be heading to Wizard World Chicago. Time to get back to the board...

urbnswshbklr

07-27-2006 01:46 PM

let me just say that me and my friends were at that softball game...

there wasnt as strong a turn out as we expected, but for a fan boy it was awesome!!!!!!

you got to really get near the creators, talk with them in a natural enviornment, give them a little ribbing , and drink beer!!!!

seriously how great is that!!!!

my friends and i were fortunate to get s few souvinirs after the game..a game worn spiderman jersey, and two softballs...

of which we spent the con getting our new artifacts signed by many of the creators from the game..

and let me saywe went by his booth and Tucci is one of the coolest guys you can talk to and hang with...

and his pitching wasnt half bad either!!!!

he definatly had a way of keeping "magic pants" (a guy who came dressed to play and had the skills to show it) off the bases and from being a threat ala Barry Bonds

if anybodys down there next year, you have to check out the softball game...
no stuffy roms, no smelly fanboys, unfortunatly no comic con babes,
but no pretenses either, just a bunch of cool people hanging out on a nice day
playing a ballgame....

Comics&Beer

07-27-2006 01:46 PM

Hey Billy, I was the guy at the softball game that you gave a Marvel jersey to. Let me just say that the softball game was by far the best event I have ever attended at a con. You guys were great. Thanks again for the Jersey, it was great being able to run around the con getting all the team Marvel people to sign it.

And for those people who do not already know it, Billy & John Romita Jr. are the most down to earth approachable people out there. You keep drawing them and I will keeping buying them. Make mine Marvel!

BlackCatGuy

07-27-2006 05:44 PM

Hey Billy, aren't youngsters a ball?! I remember one of my twin sons, when they were just 4 years old, scratched the cornea of his eye as well! The screams were terrifying! We didn't get him to the ER, as we were on our way to a picnic, but we did manage to get him some eye drops and Motrin at a CVS, thank God!

Great San Diego stories by the way! I was unaware that you liked to drink!:D

I see they put you next to that Sparacio guy again! Did you do something to anger somebody, or was it just chance? (Just kidding Mark! You two should ALWAYS be put together, as you guys bring the house down!)

Oh, one more thing..... I absolutely LOVE that shot of the Heather with the cover art! GOOD GOD MAN!!!!!!:) :)

JLAJRC

07-27-2006 06:55 PM

If William doesn't be careful he may end up looking like Nick Fury at a pretty early age.

Was the woman in the second picture (the one that's not wearing a Black Cat costume) your wife? She's cute. :cool:

Billy Tucci

07-27-2006 08:01 PM

Quote:

Originally Posted by **BlackCatGuy**

Hey Billy, aren't youngsters a ball?! I remember one of my twin sons, when they were just 4 years old, scratched the cornea of his eye as well! The screams were terrifying! We didn't get him to the ER, as we were on our way to a picnic, but we did manage to get him some eye drops and Motrin at a CVS, thank God!

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Oh, one more thing..... I absolutely LOVE that shot of the Heather with the cover art! GOOD GOD MAN!!!!:.) :)

Yes, Heather is a hottie and they did stick me next to Sparky Sparacio, and boy do I hate that! Nah, it's really a pleasure.

Billy Tucci

07-27-2006 08:03 PM

Quote:

Originally Posted by **JLAJRC**

If William doesn't be careful he may end up looking like Nick Fury at a pretty early age.

Was the woman in the second picture (the one that's not wearing a Black Cat costume) your wife? She's cute. :cool:

No that's Lauren. She's single so if you want a chance, take a shower so you don't stink!

RedRonin

07-27-2006 08:35 PM

Wow Billy you really need to get your kid some sort of football helmet and pads.

And I completely agree with you about stopping someone else's kid if seems like he's running off. Better safe than sorry.

Radiate

07-27-2006 08:42 PM

Dang! I really gotta attend me some San Diego Con! Living in the UK can really be a downer when it comes to not being able to go to Cons!

Never again!

I'll be there one day! Great article yet again!

RADIATE!

heelmark

07-27-2006 09:26 PM

Do you have feelings of inadequacy? Do you suffer from shyness?
Do you sometimes wish you were more assertive?

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Tequila®. Leave Shyness Behind. (tm)

The Marvel

07-27-2006 11:13 PM

"...Shi for a major motion picture with actress Zhang Ziyi is attached to star"

Well then I guess I'll have to see it.

Mark McK

07-28-2006 10:24 AM

Your welcome!

It was me, Mark McKenna that tossed those balls and jerseys over the fence to you.

What the hell, eh? Funny, I know you guys really appreciated the game and if a few hundred more fans had known that us creators were that accessible there (more like Jim Lee, Adam Kubert, Billy, etc), then I'm sure you would have loaded the buses.

Natural environment, eh? Funny. I was thinking softball and comic artists are more like garlic to vampires! LOL! So it was Jim Lee we got at 1st base, even sweeter!

Markmck of Bayport, NY,
(coming out to visit soon!)

Quote:

Originally Posted by **urbnswshbklr**

let me just say that me and my friends were at that softball game...

there wasn't as strong a turnout as we expected, but for a fan boy it was awesome!!!!!!

you got to really get near the creators, talk with them in a natural environment, give them a little ribbing, and drink beer!!!!

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urbnswshbklr

07-28-2006 01:32 PM

don't worry mark, i didn't forget about you, or the rest of the marvel staff...i was just focusing on tucci simply because that was the premise of the article...

<http://www.newsarama.com/general/Hellion/08/Hellion8.html>

and i never said who gave us those sweet souvinirs...

but make no mistake about it, we REALLY appreciate it...it was so frickin awesome being there!!!!!!

on of the biggest hilights of the con...that and meeting ROSARIO DAWSON!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

urbnswshbklr

07-28-2006 01:34 PM

oh and i guess i should have said casual enviorment..thats what i meant..but it seemed more natural than a desk!!!!

you guys rock..

Mark McK

07-28-2006 08:48 PM

No problem!

To be honest, Im sure Marvel didn't miss the balls and jersey, and I dont think Ill be blacklisted for tossing you guys a bone for supporting us guys.. I just followed Billy's lead. Did you happen to read my article about the game? Its uhh, elsewhere.

Quote:

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Billy Tucci

07-29-2006 03:00 PM

Mark McKenna's softball article

Here's the link to Mark's article titled "Who's on First?":

<http://www.newsarama.com/general/Hellion/08/Hellion8.html>

<http://www.comicon.com/pulse/>
http://www.comicon.com/ubb/ultimatebb.php/ubb/get_topic/f/36/t/005427.html

urbnswshbklr

07-31-2006 02:24 AM

nice article...and thanks for the shout out to the fans that were..

this is only the begining i believe...

ANGELDOGGIE

08-09-2006 04:34 PM

Hey Billy great article. Aint kids da bomb!!! Looking foward to Heroes For Hire, keep up the good....errr....GREAT WORK!!!!!!!!!!!!!!:D :D :D