

# And now for something completely different:

# HEEBONICS

## When cartoons go bad

By **ANDY LEVY-AJZENKOPF**  
Staff Reporter

**B**enjamin Israel calls it the "best cartoon you've never seen." He would, seeing as he's the creator of *The Dark Comedy*, a clever twist on the rote superhero cartoons we've all come to know throughout the years.

In his cartoon world, heroes such as Batman and Robin don't dust up the criminals with ingenious detective work. Superman doesn't swoop in all red-caped and earnest to save the day. No, Israel's idea is something different. His cartoon showcases the super-criminals, depicting them excelling in all their nefarious endeavours, at least in between incarcerations.

"It's more a parody than anything else," Israel said in May, all smiles after coming off a preview screening of his series idea at the annual Anime North convention in Toronto.

As his cartoon's website attests: "Finally, a good old-fashioned superhero cartoon – without all that pesky truth and justice."

The series is set in the fictional metropolis of Diversis City. A seemingly lawful town that's really just one huge criminal playground.

Anyone halfway familiar with the world of superhero comics will recognize some familiar riffs on classic characters when looking through Israel's animated cast.

First there's Jeff Jesterman, a.k.a. Deadpan, the series' main antagonist. A deranged, psycho-genius who's impossible to predict.

Then there's his partner and wife, Mary-Anne Treiksy, or Mary-Anne Trickisy, who had to make a choice the day a vat of chemicals left her husband criminally insane: either ditch him or stay slavishly, obliviously loyal. She chose the latter.

Then we meet Thomas William Niskin, known as The Con, a man who can charm anyone out of their valuables and feel the warm fuzzies while doing it. The character's feel and look was based on Wesley from the movie *The Princess Bride*, Israel noted.



**Benjamin Israel, a voice actor, grimaces as he performs his craft.**

Lastly, there's Samantha Seter, a.k.a. Quizzy Qal, a lone gunwoman type, conspiracy theorist and the series' main kosher ingredient.

Israel said it was important for him to establish a Jewish character from the outset to allow some of his upbringing into his story arcs.

It was the first character he wrote for the series.

"She's paranoid and she's right," Israel said. "Her father calls her Shoshanna in one episode, and throughout the series, we drop little hints about her Jewishness, like the fact she won't eat pork when the other criminals go out to dine and order pig products. I would have made Deadpan Jewish, but he needed to be Italian and part of the Mafia for his story to work."

And of course, what would a city full of supervillains be without the requisite superhero to foil their diabolical plans? Turns out, in Israel's world, not much.

Enter The Silver Hammer, vigilante do-gooder and bumbling idiot who couldn't apprehend a shoplifter if it meant saving his life.

A Toronto voice actor himself – he voices Deadpan, among others – Israel, 25, said he first developed the series idea while brainstorming with

fellow acting students and friends while he studied at Humber College acting school in 2007.

He said he was thrust into the world of voice acting in 2003 after a chance meeting with an industry legend at that year's Anime North convention.

There, he met Scott McNeil, a Vancouver-based voice actor who's voiced thousands of cartoon characters. Israel's natural talent managed to make an impression.

"Something clicked between us," Israel said. "He told me, 'You have to do what I do.' As a little kid, I always did voices. So when a voice actor like McNeil told me I could make a living at it, I thought, 'Cool!'"

Following McNeil's advice, in 2005 Israel entered the Vancouver Film School to voice train. He's been hooked ever since.

Now that he's written and developed a series where he can indulge in his passion, all Israel needs is some exposure and someone with deep pockets willing to take a chance on his idea, he said.

Over the last three years, he's been told by veteran cartoon industry executives that his idea is solid, but that as an unknown, he has no caché in their circles.

One studio did say they'd pick up his series, but only if he dumbed it down.

"They said it was too highbrow for their audience," Israel lamented. He refused the offer.

Not that he's unwilling to modify or completely rescript his story, if that's what it takes to get the series made, Israel admitted.

"I've designed *The Dark Comedy* in a way that it could be made into as many products as possible. If it doesn't work out as a TV show, it could be a comic book," he said. "If only I can get some investors, then the networks can pick what they'd like. My only criteria is that I just need to [remain] the head writer."

In the meantime, Israel is funding his project out of his own pocket, paying his cast from money earned doing voice-overs for and acting in commercials and other gigs.

While he loves his work, he cautioned aspiring voice actors to be prepared to tough out an industry that isn't always kind to newcomers.

"It's not as easy as one thinks. You can go to a thousand auditions and not get the role. But it's that one role you do get that makes you forget the other 999," Israel said. "Also, don't do it because you want to become famous. You won't. Do it because you love it. Most importantly, do not become jaded. You'll be told you're not good enough, but don't let that hurt you. Hold on to your ideas."

Visit [www.thedarkcomedy.com](http://www.thedarkcomedy.com) if you want to know more about the cartoon.



**The Con**

**Mary-Anne Trickisy**



**Deadpan**

**Quizzy Qal**

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