JOHNNY BULLET

PRESS KIT

A TOUGH GUY. HE'S BRAVE. HE'S CLEVER AND HE DRIVES MUSCLE CARS FOR A LIVING. SOMETIMES (OKAY, MOST OF THE TIME), HE SOLVES CRIMES. *JOHNNY BULLET* IS A NEWSPAPER-STYLE ACTION ADVENTURE COMIC WITH A RETRO 1970S FEEL... AN ACTION ADVENTURE HERO,... HE DOESN'T HAVE ANY ULTERIOR MOTIVES OR A DARK SIDE. HE'S JUST A GOOD GUY... HE'S ALWAYS PUNCHING, SMASHING INTO THINGS AND DRIVING FAST CARS.

@OZONEOCEAN (MICHAEL JOHN MORRIS), *THE DRUNK DUCK.*

BY HERVÉ ST-LOUIS

Johnny Bullet Brings the Classic Newspaper Tradition Online

Johnny Bullet– *a classic 1970s adventure strip, on the web, about a man and his ride.*

Toronto, Canada (June 6, 2016); *Johnny Bullet* is a brawny, hi-octane strip zooming in on the rage for 1970 retro drag racers and driven by the nostalgia for classic newspaper comics. Cartoonist Hervé St-Louis redefines automotive comics for today's generation.

Set in 1974, the strip is about a brash, daring, and smart hero who drives muscle cars and foils crimes. Inspired by Frank Frazetta's *Johnny Comet* and actor Steve McQueen, the comic explores the world of 1970s racing while Johnny Bullet chases beautiful women and outruns shady characters.

At the start of the series, Johnny narrowly escapes death in a sabotaged stunt car that killed his mechanic on a movie set. While he travels to Cross Roads, Tennessee, to escape the murder investigation, he is drawn into small town politics and local street racing. Are Johnny's problems in Cross Roads and the murder of his mechanic related?

St-Louis published the first instalment on November 2014 at ComicBookBin.com, a comic news and review site. ComicBookBin publishes *Johnny Bullet* every Sunday as a free black and white retro web comic strip.

Follow *Johnny Bullet* at comicbookbin.com/bullet and if you want to test your high school French at comicbookbin.com/Johnny.

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Johnny Bullet - A man and his ride

Logline
A brash but clever professional drag racer gets embroiled in local street racing and small town politics after evading the suspicious murder of his best friend.

Synopsis
It's all about the race for 1970s professional drag racer Johnny Bullet. When he isn't racing or performing movie stunts, he's street racing across America. Dodging villains and chasing women, few can catch up to him. Always riding, Johnny can hardly stay put. He's running from himself and others.

Audience
The strip is a must for fans of muscle cars, auto racing, and old school adventure. The series is for an all-age audience.

Production Timeline
Chapter one (strips 1-22) introduces Johnny's world, and teenaged origin. In chapter two (strips 23-44), Johnny street races against the Leduc brothers in Cross Roads. Chapter three (strips 45-66) jumps into the Cross Roads intrigue. In chapter four (strips 67-88), Johnny races out of trouble- and out of Cross Roads. The series will be completed and coloured before being released for print.

Setting
America's obsession with muscle cars was changing in the 1970s. The post 1973 Oil Crisis cost of gas, increased insurance premiums, underperforming cars, and bad press transformed street and drag racing from mainstream culture into fringe and expensive lifestyles. Johnny navigates through this changing world in a storyline set between Mt. Rushmore, South Dakota, and Cross Roads, Tennessee.
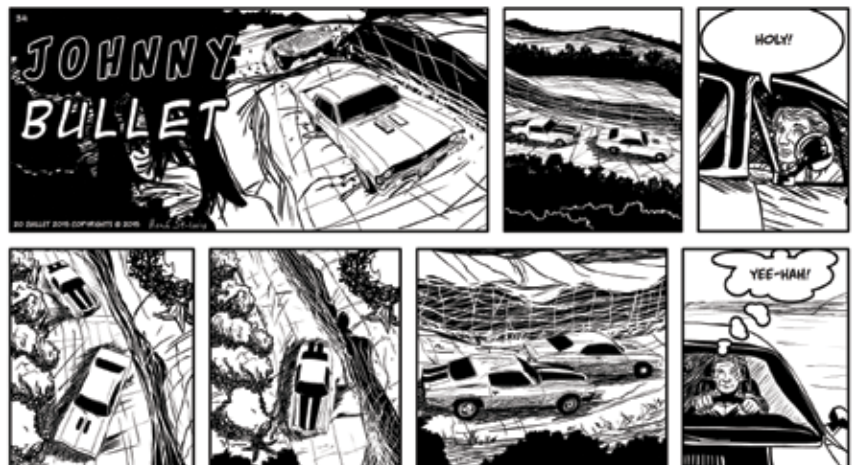
Johnny Bullet
26-year-old daredevil Johnny Bullet is obsessed with riding muscle cars. Except when it's racing-related, he runs away from responsibilities.

Sergei Moreau
Sergei Moreau is Johnny's manager. He likes money and keeps the racing team afloat.

Doug Hawthorne
The late Doug Hawthorne was Johnny's mechanic and oldest friend. His death kicks off Johnny's adventure.

Donnie Bayard
Donnie Bayard works with Johnny and his team on a research project on racing drivers. She loves Johnny.

Maggy Leduc
Smart but of humble means, Maggy Leduc lives in Cross Roads, Tennessee. Johnny has a crush on her.

Colt Leduc
Maggy and Brook Leduc's brother, Colt Leduc is a broke street racer.

Brook Leduc
Maggy and Colt Leduc's brother, Brook Leduc is a womanizer and a street racer.

Mr. Bacon
Mr. Bacon who owns most of businesses in Cross Roads. He hates Johnny Bullet.

Mrs. Bacon
Whether using her remarkable cooking skills or strong will, Maude Bacon can influence anyone.

Sheriff Fine
Sheriff Fine is the law in Cross Roads, and Mr. Bacon's lieutenant.

Cooper Edgewater
Mechanic Cooper Edgewater is Maggy, Colt, and Brook Leduc's cousin and Jackson Leduc's nephew.

Uncle Jackson Leduc
Jackson Leduc, the patriarch of the Leduc clan, is Maggy, Colt, Brook Leduc, and Cooper Edgewater's uncle. He is a moonshiner.

INTERVIEW WITH HERVÉ ST-LOUIS

By Zachary Edwards

1. Probably an obvious question, but why race cars?

I think it comes from two places: Steve McQueen, who's best known for his racing skills, and my long-time fascination with pony cars.

2. What drew you to this material instead of a more common genre, like crime noir or sci-fi adventure?

When I started *Johnny Bullet*, I thought it would be a crime noir comic like *Secret Agent X-9* (1937) or even *Johnny Comet* (1952). This was ditched early on as the strip started taking form. It still has those noir elements, but it is a bit more of a postmodern twist than a straight up homage.

3. What are some of your favourite action or race car films?

Bullitt (1968) is the classic car chase film. Many friends have introduced me to other movies and even said that they saw traces of classic films like *Vanishing Point* (1971) in my work. I haven't seen *Vanishing Point* yet!

I watched McQueen's *Le Mans* (1971) many times for inspiration. It's a pure racing film, whereas his other work is often car chases. Just like a pony car or a muscle car, some can fit both categories but they aren't the same.

Other great movies are *Two-Lane Black Top* (1971) and *Dirty Mary Crazy Larry* (1974). I like these two very much. I saw *Dirty Mary* before *Two-Lane*, even though the former is almost a remake of the latter. *Dirty Mary* lacks the existentialism but has a clearer plot. Both films have amazing car chases and plenty of street racing.

4. You mentioned that the first seventy or so strips is the first major arc of *Johnny Bullet*? Where can fans expect the series to go moving forward?

The 'whodunnit' murder investigation concerning Doug Hawthorne (Johnny's mechanic) continues but the next storyline after Cross Roads focuses on Johnny. The next storyline explores his past and what drives him, literally. The strip's motto, "a man and his ride," is a big part of this

next arc because cars play a big role in Johnny's world and how he relates to other people. The next storyline explores this. It's going to be fun. It starts around *Johnny Bullet* #88.

5. What do you think is important when writing these characters? How do you know where to take them and the story?

Often people think characterization means making a character eats a chocolate cake. For me, characterization is about finding what happens when the character avoids the chocolate cake.

Johnny was running away from his responsibilities after Doug's murder, which is why he ended up in Cross Roads. That's what I mean by characterization where a character avoids the chocolate cake. I have a lot to say about Johnny's exit after the murder of his friend, which is why the story's heading this direction now.

6. The comic follows a very classic newspaper style. What are the advantages of that style as opposed to a more comic book design choice?

I decided to use the comic strip because of the similarities I see with web comics. Both rely on what I call micro-releases. Unlike a comic book or a graphic novel, readers get a small fragment of the story ever few days. In *Johnny Bullet*'s case, that's once a week. I introduced comic strip techniques to strengthen my web comic storytelling, like the fact that every strip ends on a cliffhanger.

Between strips, there is some passage of time. You can see this in great strips like *Calvin and Hobbes* (1985), *Pogo* (1948) and *Peanuts* (1950). Even if the action continues

from the previous strip, there's still a gap. It forces the reader to fill in and pay attention to the previous strip. Web comics have made this much easier to do since the previous strip is just one click away.

This also helps me save space because I don't have frequent recaps. Having easy access to the previous strip helps keep the comic moving forward. It's a web comic about street racing and muscles cars, speed and momentum are important!

Comic strips, unlike comic books have more constraints; smaller spaces to tell a shorter part of a bigger story, forcing me to wrap up everything in the last panel. I like these creative constraints. If *Johnny Bullet* was written as a free-flowing comic book or a graphic novel, where what happens in a page can overflow in the next, the story would feel different.

7. The comic feels pretty old school, like its use of thought balloons that you don't see very often anymore. Why use these classic comics' devices?

Yeah, I'm very conscious about my use of thought bubbles when creating *Johnny Bullet*. They completely disappeared from most comics by the 2000s. Instead, narration with extended monologues are popular. This technique borrows from prose novels and film. There is little narration in *Johnny Bullet* but a lot of thought bubbles. I stick closer with comics' own grammar.

In *Johnny Bullet* #54 and #57, I used cartoon hearts to signify love. In #21, I used floating stars to express that a character is stunned. Some critics find these devices out of place for a 'serious' comic. I disagree. This is the vernacular of the comic strip. These are some of the ways cartoonists get their points across instead of using prose or film tricks.

8. Johnny Bullet is a two-tone, black-and-white strip. Why did you decide using that palette?

If we're being honest, the primary reason is time. If I had to colour the entire strip, I couldn't put new ones out every week. But it's also part of my larger strategy for the series. Web comics are free, but my plan is to collect *Johnny Bullet* in multiple printed volumes as the story progresses. How can I get an online reader interested in a book? Well,

how about offering colour as well as bonus pages?

In terms of colours, I've done many tests and found that watercolours would look best for a comic with such stark contrasts. Watercolours are great when trying to achieve an over-exposed look on a black-and-white page. I also like the randomness and errors inherent in watercolours. But readers will have to wait for the print version of *Johnny Bullet* to see that.

9. Where do you hope to see Johnny Bullet in the future?

I wouldn't mind seeing a *Johnny Bullet* film one day. It's a perfect comic for a movie adaptation.

Of course it could be a racing game like *Grand Theft Auto* (2001), or even a cartoon series where the stories are short bites just like the comic strip. I think that'd be fun to watch.

I'm hoping to continue drawing *Johnny Bullet* stories for years to come. The 1970s is such a rich decade and barely two weeks have passed in the comic itself. There are so many stories to be told.

10. Can you walk us through the process of making a strip? How do you start and what tools do you use?

I'm an academic, so everything starts with research. I research every detail related to the 1970s. Obviously, I spend a lot of time learning about the cars, but I'll even research what kind of socks men wore then. Doing the research is half of the fun.

I write my scripts on a Notepad-like app on my phone. Writing on my phone means that I can write anywhere at

any time. My scripts aren't comprehensive. They're more loose one line items, sometimes with dialogues. It all comes together when I break down the rough sketches.

I draw the strip digitally using Adobe Flash. I still use Flash CS4. I come from animation and have been using Flash since 1999. It's great for drawing.

I assemble a *Johnny Bullet* strip like an animated cartoon. I use several separate compositions (known as symbols in Flash) for each panel. Within each composition, there are layers for the rough sketches and clean illustrations. Because Flash is vector-based, the art is resolution-free and can be exported to large sizes without compromise.

Lettering for both the English and the French versions is done in the same document. I then export the different versions of the pages for the Web and print.

Finally, I draw using a 21-inch Wacom Cintiq. Many animation studios have moved to the large Cintiq screens in the last ten years. I stopped using paper in 2007 when I did game animation with a Cintiq at work. I loved it so much that I bought myself one for home. It's expensive but worth it.

11. The strip is published simultaneously in French and English. Has being bilingual yourself affected the comic in any way?

When I create a script, it's very rudimentary and no more than an outline. The outlines are written in both French and English. They only make sense if one is fully bilingual. When I think in English, the plot is more straightforward and action-based. When I think in French, I focus on nuances like the relationships and characterization between Johnny and other characters.

It's important to mention that neither the French nor the English version of *Johnny Bullet* is more authoritative than the other one. They're equal. Neither is a translation of the other. Dialogues are written specifically for each version.

HERVÉ ST-LOUIS – ARTIST STATEMENT AND BIO
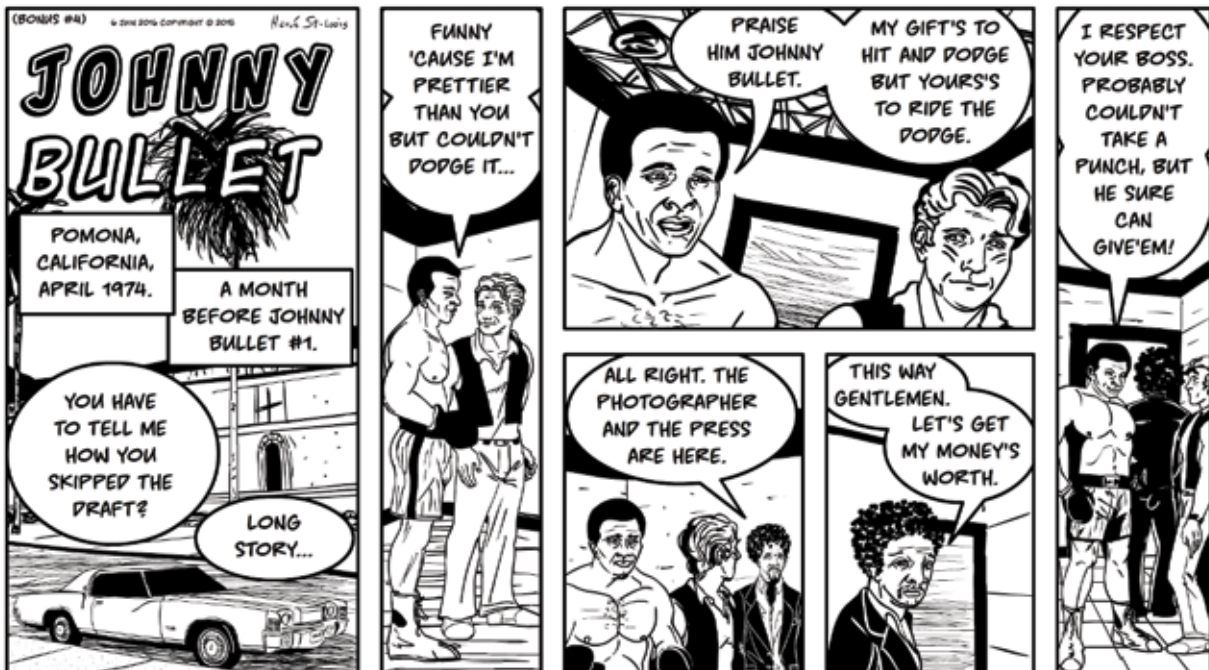
Johnny Bullet was born, like many things in this world, from tragedy. He came into my life when I needed him. The Calgary flood of 2013 had swept away my comic book collection, and all of my animation and comic drawings. *Johnny Bullet* exists because I had nothing left in my personal portfolio and needed to start from scratch.

At first, I wanted to license the rights to Steve McQueen for a comic series. The agency handling McQueen's estate never responded. I'm glad they never did. It's much more fun to create *Johnny Bullet* without the brand constraints and licensing fees related to working on a Steve McQueen comic.

I started this comic without knowing exactly who Johnny was but wanting to keep the story as simple as possible. I wanted straightforward action and plain fun. Of course, I knew that the story would become more complex and layered over time, but I was in no rush to complicate things.

Johnny Bullet starts in 1974. Inspiration comes from crime noir, 1970s popular culture, Steve McQueen, and my then superficial love of muscle cars. Through *Johnny Bullet*, I know much more about this rich era and the muscle cars that defined so much of its automotive culture. Plus, I'm very happy to focus on the 1970s. So many comics reach to the present or future instead of looking back.

While the comic may be in the past (some would argue, look like it's from that era), I make it using the current technology. I draw *Johnny Bullet* digitally with Adobe Flash and my 21 inches Wacom Cintiq screen. Nothing is physical and everything has backups. No more floods will take away all my work.

The comic itself bears this juxtaposition of past and present as well, right down to its classically-styled logo. Each page is episodic and self-contained, which is uncommon in web comics. The landscape look was designed for desktop computers, tablets and mobile phones, whereas single column vertical digital comics are still popular.

Better known as Toon Doctor®, I research usable security, a branch of human-computer interaction. Usable security is about making your devices and apps convenient, responsive, and safe.

My interest in usable security comes from my cartoon animation background. Like an information architect, I want to simplify how viewers make sense of the information presented in cartoons, apps, and storyboards. This interest and past scholarly work in cybersecurity, led me to research in usability, user experience, and information security.

A doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Information at the University of Toronto, I obtained my bachelor's degree in History and Political Sciences from McGill University. Later, I researched Twitter and the 2009 Green Revolution in Iran for my Master's degree at the University of Calgary's Centre for Military and Strategic Studies.

After graduating from ICARI, an animation school in 1997, I worked as a motion artist on many cartoon series such as *Oggy and The Cockroaches*. Starting Toon Doctor® in 2001, I developed Adobe Flash courseware in the 2000s, collaborated on several e-learning projects for the pharmaceutical, health, and banking industries, then created mobile apps such as TED and ComicBookBin, in the 2010s.

In 2002, I founded ComicBookBin, Canada's largest comic news and review site.

In 2014, tired of looking into the comic's world from the outside, I created *Johnny Bullet*, a web comic about a 1970s drag racer. It has provided a counterpoint to my academic work.

Fully bilingual, I was born in Montréal, Canada. Today, I live in Toronto, Canada.

FACT SHEET

What

1970s drag racer Johnny Bullet has problems. Problems with cars, bad guys, and bad women. His adventures are chronicled in a web comic strip published every Sunday and available in French and English. Story chapters in *Johnny Bullet* are 22-pages long. The first page of every new chapter (pp 23, 45, 67) offers new readers a brief recap of the entire comic strip.

When

After a few months in development, *Johnny Bullet* was launched on November 2, 2014. New pages appear every Sunday at ComicBookBin.com and mirrored on web comic portals The Drunk Duck, Tapastic, Comic Fury, WebComics. fr, Smart Jeeves, and Amilova. *Johnny Bullet* fans can access the web comic for free in all these locations.

Where

The strip is set in the small town of Cross Roads, a real unincorporated town in Tennessee (spelled Crossroads), neighbouring Savannah in Hardin County. In *Johnny Bullet*, Cross Roads is comparable in size to Savannah.

Who

Johnny Bullet is created, written, and drawn by Canadian Hervé St-Louis, a PhD candidate researching human-computer interaction at the Faculty of Information at the University of Toronto. St-Louis releases new *Johnny Bullet* strips in French and English simultaneously.

Why

Johnny Bullet was originally inspired by the late leading Hollywood actor Steve McQueen, who was famous for performing his own driving stunts in his movies. Frank Frazetta's *Johnny Comet*, a 1950s strip about a race car driver, is a long-time favourite of creator St-Louis, and an inspiration for *Johnny Bullet*.

How

Creator Hervé St-Louis draws the strip digitally using Adobe Flash, a precursor to Adobe's Animate, using a 21-inch Wacom Cintiq as his drawing hardware. St-Louis borrows from animation production techniques when creating *Johnny Bullet*. A colour version of *Johnny Bullet* is planned for the print edition. The book will contain the first four chapters (strips 1-88), as well as bonus pages.

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