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BACKGROUND:

**JIM SHOOTER: DEFIANT DREAMER
OF THE AMERICAN STORYTELLERS' DREAM**

-- A Kid With Vision of Better World, Peopled With Triumphant Good Guys and Loathsome Bad Guys and Told With the Ease and Wisdom of Mark Twain, Brings It Passionately to Life in Gotham --

Our story begins in 1957. Young Jim Shooter stands in front of Miss Grosier's first-grade class in Hillcrest Elementary School in Bethel Park, PA. He's trying to think of a "really good word." The game: Each child offers up a word to the class and earns a point for each classmate who can't spell it. Whoever gets the most points gets the coveted gold star.

Master Shooter says, "Bouillabaisse."

"You don't even know what that is," scoffs the teacher.

"It's fish soup."

"You can't spell that."

"Can too."

"Come here. Write it."

He writes it. She looks it up. He's right.

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He wins the gold star. And, thereby, firmly establishes a pattern in which truth and justice prevail, despite doubt and cynicism, thanks to that quintessential American art form, the comic book. In fact, it was a *Donald Duck* comic book that first brought bouillabaisse to young Shooter's attention, when his mother read it to him at age four.

Thus, too, he learned "indestructible," "teletype," "vacuum," and "prestidigitation" and enough other multisyllabic entries to quickly become barred from the further first-grade vocabulary competitions. And, thus, firmly grounded in that storytelling genre, he moved rapidly on to the grand tales of *The Swiss Family Robinson*, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* and virtually anything that H.G. Wells ever wrote, before returning to his first love as a writer, aged 13.

-- If It Works for Peter Parker, It's Got to Work for Me --

It was during a low point for a teenager -- minor surgery and a hospital stay, while his family struggled through tough financial times -- that Shooter first began to wonder if comic books couldn't change his life like they did for the various superheroes he had read about. Some dog-eared Marvel comics lying around the kids' ward brought him the Peter Parker/Spider-Man™ universe, which seemed credible, accessible, and, well, "just like me," he recalls.

"In and out of costume, Pete made mistakes," Shooter says delightedly. "He had problems. One problem particularly hit home. Pete was broke. His number-one problem was lack of money. Wow. It seemed like all my life lack of money had oppressed my family. We always seemed to be on the brink of financial oblivion. Struggling, hanging on by a thread. Wolves at the door. Just like Pete and his Aunt May.

"Pete was a good boy. Again, just like me. He wanted to do good with his powers. He meant well. But there was the small matter of keeping body and soul together. He and May had to eat, after all. And it would be terrible if they lost the house. So Pete had to use his powers, as honorably as possible, of course, to make some money. If he hadn't been bitten by that radioactive spider, he probably would have had to drop out of school and get a job at the supermarket."

Though not by a radioactive spider, Shooter was bitten by the comic book bug. He reasoned that somebody must get paid for making the comics. He begged and borrowed copies of Marvel Spider-Man™ comics to figure out what made them better than others. He studied, analyzed and read them until he knew them by heart. Then he analyzed the marketplace: Which comic book company needed him most? The one with the weakest stories: National's Adventure Comics (DC Comics) with its Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes™.

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He sent off his first fledgling effort. Months passed. Then, an encouraging letter, asking him to "send another." Quickly, he dashed off two more. More months passed. Then, on February 10, 1966, a phone call. National would buy the three submissions and even commission others. But they were somewhat daunted to hear young Jim's voice on the phone -- until that point no one had imagined that the stories came from a youngster -- so they asked to speak to his mother to negotiate the deal.

The rest, as they say, is history.

-- One Step at a Time: Forging the Future of Comics --

A decade later, Shooter was Associate Editor of Marvel and two years after that became Editor-in-Chief, a position he held for more than 10 years. During his tenure, Shooter changed Marvel and, through it, the entire industry, primarily by radically restructuring the hostile relations between creators and company. First came an incentive plan for artists and writers based on the sales of comics -- along with a profit-sharing incentive plan to encourage the creation of new characters.

Next, Shooter offered life insurance and major medical coverage for all freelancers who worked regularly for Marvel. He also felt strongly about royalty payments, business expenses and materials reimbursements. He wanted it to be possible to earn a decent living as a creator at Marvel -- and he believed that the marketplace would respond better to the work of happy workers. He was right. Marvel Comics began a major turnaround. By 1980, sales of Marvel Comics constituted 70 percent of the entire market.

"I didn't just want to increase sales of existing Marvel comics," he explains. "I wanted to revolutionize the business. We started, in February 1980, with *Epic Illustrated Magazine*, the first creator-owned story series." Next, he noticed that the number of comics specialty shops in North America was increasing, so in March 1981 he published the first issue of *Dazzler* as a direct-only special. It sold 428,000 copies, proving that the direct-sales market was crucial: Today 80 percent of sales comes via direct channels.

Then, in 1982, his next innovation: Graphic novels were launched with *The Death of Captain Marvel*.

By 1983, the rest of the world was definitely taking notice. A hostile takeover attempt failed, and the Marvel board of directors took the company private. Then, in 1987, it was sold to New World Pictures, and Shooter left quickly on the heels of that news -- threatening a lawsuit if his cherished creator benefits were whittled away. He spent the next year as a consultant to Disney and publishing children's books, but always the "siren call" of comics could be heard in the distance.

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-- Now Voyager --

Shooter could not really let go of the industry he had helped create, so in 1989 he joined forces with a group of talented young "creatives" and seasoned business pros to start Valiant. His goal: to invent a superhero universe and its characters from the ground up. This was a feat no one had attempted since the 60s.

The company quickly hit its stride with the Valiant universe, a world of realistic superheroes created by Shooter. He pioneered some promotions and collectors' editions that quickly changed the face of comic book retailing. Although the company can now lay claim to 11 percent of the market -- a staggering achievement for the once-fledgling start-up -- it lost Shooter, who now views the experience as a "rough draft" of what he wants to do with his new company, the aptly named DEFIANT.

-- The DEFIANT Gang: Back by Popular Demand --

"I'm bringing together the folks I love to work with," he explains. "We've got a wonderful financial deal, total creative control, and we are storytellers first, last and always. David Lapham, the best young artist in the business, is with us, and so is Publisher Winston Fowlkes, who was a top executive at Time, Inc. for 30 years. Janet "J.J." Jackson is our Creative Director -- she established the look and colors of the Valiant line. We even have Debbie Fix back as our General Manager." One of the new faces on board is Editorial Director Deborah Purcell, former Fiction Editor of *Redbook* -- testament to Shooter's belief that the story must be the star.

"To me, when a little kid reads a comic, then ties a towel around his neck and flies around the living room -- or if he's too old for that, then wishes he could -- that's when the job is done," he says. "My biggest influence, Mark Twain, made me understand what great storytelling is by teaching me how to think. That's the secret of this business: think and tell a great story. It's hard -- impossible -- to tell a great story without having an important message to share, so you need to have something to say. We do. The imperative is to do it in an entertaining way."

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-- PLASM™: Is This Any Way for Adults to Make a Living? --

The cornerstone of the new DEFIANT universe is PLASM, a visually outrageous, high-concept fantasy that is the new wave in the marketplace. The PLASM storyline takes place both in our world and in extradimensional worldspace. A nanosecond-thin reality veil separates Earth from this other place, PLASM, which is to its dimension what the Roman Empire was to ancient Earth. Manipulation of living tissue is as normal on PLASM as changing clothes is here, so Plasmoids are unimaginably diverse. Everything is alive, and all things are genetically engineered on PLASM.

Indeed, the national pastime of PLASM is Splatterball. Imagine a game that comprises elements of football, auto racing and Roman gladiatorial combat. Players and the powerful beast-like creatures that comprise the teams are genetically altered as needed during play by pit crews called DNABlers. Even the ball is alive, and often not too happy about its predicament. To score, you have to spike the ball -- that is, impale it on the spikes of the goal post. The first team to score wins. Losers are mulched.

-- Redefining Where the Gold Stars Come From --

"I want us to be known as the revolutionaries we are," says Shooter. "We're not in this for the business-as-usual of it. You can tell that from this first story line, you can tell it from our commitments to our collaborators. We're all partners, and we're all fans. We come from the same rootstock. We're creator-friendly, and we guarantee we will care and be responsive. This is a whole new world we're creating."

"We are storytellers. Don't look for market manipulation gimmicks. We're going all the way back to the basics. Nothing makes a book more collectible than a great story line. I don't care and I promise you I'll never look at what the price guide says my comics are worth. I want people to love this stuff, and the only way to know is to watch the mail. I'll know we're on the right track when I get a submission from a 13-year-old with a vision and a passion for our stories."

At a minimum, watch out for denizens of PLASM to have an inordinate appreciation of bouillabaisse.

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