

According to Comic Vine, Mark McKenna who has worked for 29 years as an artist and inker, is credited with 542 issues of various comics. He's worked at both DC, Marvel and Dark Horse, drawing issues of Spider-Man, Wonder Woman, Doom Patrol, The Punisher, and the list goes on. So, I admit to going a little fanboy when I met him at the Rhode Island Con. Like most of the folks in the field whom I've met, he's a cool and unassuming guy with whom it was great to talk with.

At his table, he had the usual amount of wares one expects from an artist, and since I was primarily looking for new independent comics to review, didn't think I'd get more than good conversation. Then Mark pointed out his delightfully deranged Combat Jacks. The conversation had verged towards the difference in working for one of the big houses and going the independent route. No question, working for the Big 2 produces a nicer and steadier paycheck, but you are constrained in creativity. That's when he showed me his leap into the weird.

Combat Jack is exactly the kind of title that a guy like Mark would think of and the corporate publishers would turn their back on. And that is the beauty of Kickstarter. Mark was able to peddle his idea to the public at large. This direct action consumerism allows folks like Mark to by pass the second guessing and conservative group think of the corporation that is worried about upfront costs for production.

This allowed Mark to bring this labor of love (and laughter) to light. The way Mark explained it, he was at home with his son when he realized that there just aren't enough pumpkins in horror movies. From this now obvious observation, the idea of Combat Jacks took form.

The premise was to take the alien invasion in an abandoned facility on another planet trope and have fun with it. The basic story is that an earth-like planet wandered into the solar system and entered orbit opposite Earth. Convicts are sent to terraform the planet, but suddenly the base goes silent. A crack team of space marines is dispatched to investigate. What they find are evil aliens who resemble pumpkins. The story is delivered with a straight faced deadpan while the tongue is firmly planted in the cheek.

Mark originally thought of this as a "one and done."

According to Mark: "My original CJ1 ran in 2012 in Diamond as a one shot, then I spoke to a big wig at IDW who told me, if I did the book as a miniseries, he would collect it." However, to get the collected edition, Mark had to produce a 4 issue miniseries. The deal was that Mark would fund the individual issues and IDW would fund and publish the collection.

"It remains to be seen if that will happen, since a lot of time as passed, but if not, I'm fine producing a trade myself. I do publish under my own banner, Banana Tale Press."

Combat Jack #2 is out in the shops, but was sorely under ordered. Diamond let Mark know that they want to support it and him, "but dammit, it's hard to sell books if you're not Batman or Spidey!"

Billy Tucci has done a variant cover for Combat Jack. "We are friends for the past 10 year. I like doing variant covers and I thought he would be a great choice since he draws women so well."

Issue #2 picks up right after the end of issue #1, but also jumps between 1975 in Pine Bush, New York and 2118 AD. To non-New Yorkers, or connoisseurs of the weird, Pine Bush, a small town in upstate New York, has been dubbed the UFO capital of the USA. The 1975 story involves the evil alien pumpkins

invading a U-Pick pumpkin farm. The 1975 sequences are very funny, and I won't spoil it by describing them. Just think: a farm, farmers, tourists, killer pumpkins and cows. The comic practically writes itself.

Issue #3 involves the "true story" of Ichabod Crane and the headless horseman. It's being solicited by Diamond for December, so I haven't seen it yet. But, based upon issues 1 and 2, I have high hopes.

Issue #4 hasn't come out yet. However, I advise buying issues 1 through 3 and then when Kickstarter for issue #4 starts, sign on board. This is a story that needs telling.