

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Matt Kindt Managing the Minds of Comic Book Fans

John Kost · Wednesday, March 12th, 2014



Matt Kindt with his signature creation

[dropcap size=dropcap-big]A[/dropcap] couple of years ago I seriously cut back on the comics I was buying every month. I wasn't happy with most of what the mainstream publishers were doing, and not much was exciting me from the world of indies and alternatives. So I cut my collecting to just a few favorites, just the necessities: *Spider-Man* (the hero of my heart), *Jonah Hex*, and *Dark Horse Presents*.

Then I saw a new book called *MIND MGMT* on the shelves of my local comic book store. The title alone made this Dark Horse Comics offering stand out, but a quick flip through the pages also revealed artwork that was unique and memorable. I bought it and soon became lost in a world of secret government agencies, super spies and psychic powers ... all created by one Matt Kindt.

This Missouri native's combination of story and art on *MIND MGMT* kept me hooked. The premise was unique, as you will find out below, and the book promised goodness each month and continues to deliver on its way to a limited 36-issue run.

His work on the title highlights all that he has learned from the time he was a graphic designer for *The Sporting News* to the personal style he has developed through his graphic novels *Revolver*, *Super Spy*, *The Tooth*, *3 Story*, and his shorter works.

Kindt's career started out with a bang when his first graphic novel, *Pistolwhip*, was nominated for a Harvey Award – one of the comics industry's two primary annual awards, the other being the Eisner Awards. Since then he has not looked back, producing a rich body of work that has gone on to garner a Harvey win and several Eisner nominations

One of the comic industry's most talented creators took a brief break from his work to answer some questions for our readers.

John Kost: In your view, where do comics fit into the larger cultural conversation of Literature and Art?

Matt Kindt: Well, honestly I think they're like everything else – 95% of literature and art is sort of disposable junk and there's 5% that's going to be fantastic and stand the test of time. With comics however, there's literally so much less of it being produced than say novels/prose and movies and music so I think comics is still a pretty small pool to swim in. That doesn't make it any

less of an art form, I just think it's a more specialized kind of storytelling that automatically pares down the amount of artists/writers that can do it. And unlike a lot of popular mediums there's very little money up front when you start so you really have to love the art form to stick out long enough for it to make a viable living with it.



Cover for *MIND MGMT* #6

JK: Can you explain to our readers what *MIND MGMT* is about as well as the genesis of that idea?

MK: Well, the short answer is “spies with mind powers.” As for where the idea came from, I was proofreading a friend’s novel, an epic WW2 spy satire story that was partially inspired by my brother and I, a crazy epic novel that is kind of a satirical take on a lot of themes I used in *Super Spy*. Well, the main spy character in that goes through this intensive training and takes a bunch of spy courses in “spy school” and one of those was Mind Management. I just thought that was the funniest thing ever. I wondered what was that class about? I think it was supposed to be about staying calm under pressure and that kind of thing. I thought it would be a way better class if they taught you how to do crazy mind-control type things. So I did a bunch of research into real government programs and what went on, then I started building this world around Meru and Lyme with a huge cast of characters. I really wanted to do a monthly book and this seemed like a perfect story to tell that way. I pitched it to Dark Horse along with a detailed outline of each story arc and the ending – originally as 56 issues, and they green-lit that. Immediately after I started the first 6, I realized that while I could fill up 56 issues, the story would just be a little too airy and I really wanted to pack each issue with as much information as I could to justify a monthly read, kind of go against the grain of a lot of the breezy comics that come out now that take 5 minutes to read. I shortened the outline to 36 issues and yeah – there’s definitely an ending.

JK: You are both a writer and an artist. Which came first for you creatively, writing or drawing?

MK: Writing. I read so much growing up, my whole life really. Prose is my first love. And then my older brother got me into comics, which inspired me to draw. I loved art as well but writing was always first. I remember hand-writing these epic action stories in grade-school and into high school that were just action adventure stories and all of my friends were characters in them. So I’d finish a chapter and then pass it around for my friends to read, all hand-written on loose-leaf notebook paper.



Red Handed, one of Kindt’s stellar graphic novels

JK: You worked for *The Sporting News* up until 2001. Is there something you took away from that experience, or from sports in general, that helped you in your transition to a writer and artist for comics and graphic novels?

MK: Not really. I actually had no interest in sports at the time. I kind of liked baseball and some football but that was it. I was working as a graphic designer so from 1995 when I graduated until 2001 when my first book was published, I was trying to learn as much about the printing process, production, and publishing as I could so I could apply it to comics. At the *Sporting News* I got really good with Photoshop – used it every day for some really intense layouts and all of that

design experience has really helped my comic book craft. I can handle every part of putting together a monthly book like *MIND MGMT* from beginning to end without having to rely on anyone else. For better or worse, what you see on the page is all me – no one else to blame.

JK: What are some of the differences, or challenges you face, when it comes to collaborating with another artist or writer?

MK: I think the biggest challenge is just clarity. When I write a script for myself I'm picturing it already so I don't have to write much, just the minimum to jog my memory when it comes time to draw it. And even then, I can change things up until the last second if I have a different or better idea. When I hand a script off to an artist however, that script needs to be pretty much figured out. It needs to be written clearly with just enough detail to paint the picture, but loose enough so that the artist can feel like they have room to bring something to it as well. I love it when the pages come back slightly different or with an extra panel here or there because it shows me that the artist is thinking about the story... that they're into it and trying to make it even better. Collaborating can be fantastic experience – which surprised me. I thought I'd be a horrible controlling creative partner but I haven't been too bad so far (I think.)



Matt's salute to Spider-Man

JK: What are some of the similarities and differences between working for one of the big like D.C., and working for smaller publishers like Dark Horse and Top Shelf?

MK: Well, it's not really the size of the publisher that makes a difference. It's more about what you're writing. Everything I've been doing with Dark Horse is creator owned (not counting the Star Wars limited series) – so I have total control over it and I get as little or as much editorial interaction as I want. I benefit from any movie/media deals and see better royalties so the business part of it is much better in some ways. And when I'm 60 years old and too sick to write and draw any more I'll have a library of work that I own that will hopefully act as my retirement. The flipside of it is that I have to do a lot more work promoting the books and getting out there and hand-selling it and talking to retailers and that kind of thing. Which is something I don't mind doing. Ultimately Batman and Superman are going to sell themselves. Working for the bigger publishers has great aspects to it as well. The work I've done with Marvel and DC and Valiant has all been slightly different, but I think I came to them after I'd already made a body of work so the expectation from me was different than someone who's just trying to get work-for-hire writing gigs. My editors kind of knew what kind of stories I was good at and was interested in telling so it was a smooth transition. The page rate up front is much higher on those kinds of books so there's a benefit there and it's just fun to work on characters I grew up loving. The ability to have a foot in both of those worlds is ideal really. I couldn't love what I do anymore than I already do.



Matt's cover for *Star Wars: Rebel Heist*

JK: Which one of your books would you most want to see translated into film or TV?

MK: Any of them really, I guess *MIND MGMT* since that's my most current project and the one I like the most (my favorite is always the thing I'm currently working on). But any of them would be fantastic. I think part of the fun for me in that process will be seeing how another artist/writer/director interprets what I've done and to literally see what someone else has gotten out

of the book. Everyone's interpretation is slightly different so that's the most interesting thing to me. I think comics, unlike prose, have a built-in vagueness to them that relies on the reader much more to fill in the gaps. So having something like that translated into another medium is fun to watch.

JK: Which characters from comics, film, or TV would you most want to work on as an artist or writer?



Another beauty

MK: I'm not sure about that answer anymore. I got to write a Wolverine story and a Spider-Man story and a Justice League story so that pretty much covered everything. Daredevil was my favorite as a kid but he's been done so well for so long that I think I just prefer to be a fan of that character. I think Black Widow is one that I still have a story idea for that I wouldn't mind tackling at some point.

JK: Who are your creative and artistic influences outside the realm of comics?

MK: I love J D Salinger, Joseph Heller and Philip K. Dick as far as writers go, and artistically, I've always been a big fan of Edward Hopper and I love Cindy Sherman's photography. I love single images that are full of story and I think both do that so well.

JK: You're stranded on a desert island, what three graphic novels do you wish you had with you?

MK: Easy! *From Hell*, *Watchmen*, and *Cages*.

JK: What's next for Matt Kindt?

MK: I'm heading into the final year of *MIND MGMT*. I'm finishing up the next story arc, which will take me to issue 24, so only 12 more issues to go. I think 12 issues seemed like a lot when I started, but now it doesn't seem like so much. I've got a lot of story to pack into that last year. Valiant just announced my next on-going series with them called *Rai*, which takes place in the year 4000 so that's going to be some fun hard-sci-fi, which I've always wanted to do. And I'm doing a 4-issue limited Star Wars series for Dark Horse. I've got another creator-owned monthly that's in the works as well as a kid's graphic novel called *Poppy!* Which I'm finishing up now with my buddy Brian Hurtt (*Sixth Gun*.)

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