

Alumni Spotlight: Ken Kristensen (Film '08)

Written by CUE Editor

Thursday, 07 February 2013 09:36



On January 16th, Image Comics (The Walking Dead) published Ken Kristensen's comic book *Todd the Ugliest Kid on Earth*. A darkly funny story about a little boy navigating a grotesque world. The first issue sold out in 24 hours, and is now selling for ten times its cover price on eBay, and has gotten amazing reviews. The publisher is going back to press for a second printing of issue #1. Issue #2 hits stores February 13. Below Ken tells us how he teamed up with his storyboard artist from his Columbia short films, got inspired by Todd Solondz, and found his publisher at San Diego Comic Con.

It all started by finding My co-creator and artist on the series, M.K. Perker. He was and is a frequent illustrator for the New York Times Book Review and Op-Ed page, and at the same time he was partnering up with me as the storyboard artist and production designer on my Columbia short films. Our artistic collaboration on every project was so strong we decided to form a permanent creative partnership. We'd meet every week at MK's Harlem apartment to brainstorm new projects.

During that period I was lucky enough to get a summer job for one of my filmmaking heroes, Todd Solondz. I knew MK was a big fan of Solondz's satirical masterpieces *Welcome to the Dollhouse* and *Happiness*, films that deal with the ugliness of human behavior in suburban America. One day I invited MK to the set to meet the director. The three of us talked for a long time. We talked about the kind of things you talk about with Todd Solondz --comics, film, and anti-psychotic medication.

MK was inspired by that meeting to do a sketch of a boy with a bag on his head and "Todd" written on his shirt. There was something fascinating about the design of the character, but we didn't really have a story or a personality for the character.

Around the same time, my nephew, came visit me in New York City. At 3 or 4 years old my nephew had a knack for interpreting all the terrible stuff you see on your average stroll through Times Square in the most innocent and beautiful way. I mean, he'd see someone lying in a pool

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of blood and he'd point at the scene and say, "look, that guy tripped and spilled cranberry juice all over himself." And you'd see a cranberry juice bottle lying in the gutter and understand how that kid's brain took the most beautiful approach to the world based on the clues he had.



Those two experiences were integral to creating the character of Todd, an innocent kid caught up in the ugly realities of his world, but with a blind obsession that makes him interpret everything positively. Once we had our core character it was a matter of building a supporting cast, and pushing the boundaries of his world to the extreme to make it funny and heartbreaking.

M.K. and I came up with the basics of the story together, brainstormed characters, and then I went away and fleshed it out and wrote the script.

Comic book scripts are a bit different from film or television scripts -- usually they are broken down by page and panel. And most of the time the writer is very specific about the content of each panel. But in this case, I broke it down by page (an average comic book is 22 pages) and left it up to M.K. to determine how many panels were needed per page to tell the story. Interpreting a written story in sequential art is second nature to him. He's a true master of the grammar of visual storytelling.

He sends me finished pages and I type word balloons onto them and send them back to the artist

In terms of finding a publisher...we pounded the pavement -- and by pavement I mean San Diego Comic-con. We walked the floor of the convention and stopped by the booths of every decent publisher. We got several offers but ultimately we chose Image Comics. With *The Walking Dead* and other huge hits, Image is absolutely on fire. We couldn't be more thrilled with our publisher and all they're doing for us.

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You can get the book at thousands of brick and mortar comic book stores or by mail at any number of online retailers, including: www.TFAW.com

Also, the digital version of every issue is available for the iPad, iPhone, Android devices, and computers -- through the iTunes/iBook store, Comixology.com, ComicsPlus app, Graphicly.com, and the Image Comics app. The digital version contains supplemental bonus material, including our original pitch pages.

Ken will be doing a signing at Meltdown Comics in Los Angeles on February 13th at 7:00 PM. For more information and an updated list of events visit the Todd facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/todd.theugliestkidonearth>