

The New Comics: John Cardinal/MONSTA

written by Guest Contributor | April 2, 2015



MONSTA, "Toonstone"

JOHN CARDINAL uses the alias "MONSTA" because it makes him feel like a superhero. He is the publisher at Tryptic Press, best known for *Chroma*, a Boston-based art annual. John has a BFA from Montserrat in Illustration, and can be found online through his personal website at [Monstaville](#), as well as through [Tryptic Press](#).

ON VARIETY AND SCHIZOPHRENIA

 There's a variety and a schizophrenia to what I do. When I go by my real name, it's the PG stuff – children's books, clean stuff, corporate stuff. MONSTA has been my name for all the stuff I do that might not fall into that realm. Under MONSTA I can do fine art, I can do rated-R things, crazy things. I have children's books like *Thomas and the Tiger-Turtle*, which is funny, but when I want to draw a skull girl covered with blood, well...

The restrictions are on my real name. The things I sign with "John" I make sure are clean. I kinda like the idea of having a pseudonym, having a show where they don't even know it's me. When I do children's book signings, I only bring stuff I do as John. When I do a show as MONSTA, I *could* bring children's books, but it creates a weird table.

I've always approached my work looking for the right line. I get an idea in my head, and I don't decide a medium I'm gonna use – I'll use whatever pen is around in order to get the look. I might paint it, I might Photoshop. Whatever makes the line, that's what I use. That's how I approach the MONSTA stuff.

With the children's books, I pick a traditional watercolor, or a comic style. I narrow the focus. But when I do the other stuff, that's whatever gets the line out.

ON PUBLISHING AND PROJECTS

 Tryptic Press is me and artists Andy Houle and Michael Crockett. Our first idea was a small book called *Tryptic*, something to sell at Boston Con. We got to talking and the idea for *Chroma* came up – to create a book that featured the people we know as a promotional piece, like *Sparrow* or *Juxtapose*. Our goal is to find people who are doing good work and then put a spotlight on them.

I have a direction I'm moving towards, and anything that fits into that, I take on. I want to quit my day job and do comics and fine art stuff. I've had a couple of projects in my brain a long time, so anything that  takes me

there I take on, anything shiny and new. But I concentrate on little projects. I don't want an ongoing project with any big publishers – but if Spider-Man came along, I'd draw it in a heartbeat!

Super-Secret Heroes is something I worked on with my children. It's going to be a much bigger project, but I've worked with my children to create the stories. It's great having character sessions with my kids. *The Guys* is a creator-owned book I did with Lawrence Rosales about the heroin massacre of Plano, Texas. He's from there. We did issue one in 2013, but now we're going to start putting it up as a webcomic, a page a week.

Other than that, I've done two books through a children's book publisher, and I'm the pre-press coordinator for a greeting card company. I do file prep. I'm the geeky graphic designer.

ON DIRECTION AND MISDIRECTION

✖ With "Toonstone," a friend of mine named Harry Moyer wanted to do a western-themed online anthology called *Saddle Sore*, and reached out to a sketchblog I host on [11 O'Clock Comics](#). I liked it and I had a dumb idea for it. Sometimes you have funny ideas, and you gotta get 'em so they don't live. I figured, "Hey, you could almost reject it for being goofy or whatever, but it's just too cool."

I guess I'm like that a lot. Somebody locally asked me to do something for a charity event surrounding Day of the Dead. They had seen my children's book—so I didn't give them anything like a children's book. I did a hairy-pitted Day of the Dead girl looking at crickets with a Dr. Death guy behind her. They loved it, but I'm sure it wasn't what they expected. I'm not gonna give you what you expect! I just sat down and this was what came out.

For example, a friend asked me to do a piece for a zombie-themed art show, so I said sure – I'll do zombies attacking Times Square. Like that's the smallest thing I can think of! (*laughs*)

But I guess each thing I do has a story. I think any good illustration has a story.



Zombie Central (click to expand)

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