

WARNING: this story contains GRAPHIC CONTENT

Passion for comic books fuels business enterprise, sketch art

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Staff Reporter

Sophomore Mark Killmer and Ted Baalmann, a senior at Francis Howell North High School in St. Charles, Mo., are responsible for creating about 300 people. Someday, the world might get to meet them.

Killmer and Baalmann came up with the idea of MT Stories, a comic book line and publishing company, three years ago when they met in high school marching band.

"I was standing there, and [Ted] walked up and said, 'So I hear you like comics,'" Killmer said.

After an eight-hour conversation, the two became best friends, Killmer said. They began creating an entire business plan for MT Stories, which they will put into action after graduating from Truman in a few years.

Killmer

said he is double majoring in English, to foster his literature and publishing background, and business, to learn how to start up a company. For now, he said he is mainly focusing on the creative writing aspects of his comic books.

Less like Superman, more like Peter Parker

In the very beginning, each made his own character – a hero and a villain – and combined the two to make their first superhero, Killmer said.

"Once we came up with our first character, we knew it was a little too out there for anything that's already been done," he said.

Although their characters have superpowers, Killmer said they didn't acquire them from an alien source – the characters of the MT universe come from this world, and before they changed into superheroes or villains they were ordinary humans like anybody else.

"All of our heroes had something happen to them that made them who they are," he said.

So, Killmer said, their characters can be thought of as less like Superman and more like Peter Parker.

Baalmann and Killmer use an index card box, called "The Directory" after an unofficial Web site of Marvel characters, to hold information on the more than 300 characters they have dreamed up.

Killmer and Baalmann's first character was "Kinetic," aptly named after the type of energy he possesses.

"That's really what he harnesses," Killmer said. "He can super-

charge himself with kinetic energy to give him super strength or harness super speed."

Killmer said Kinetic gained his powers after he was kidnapped into a super soldier project – an event Kinetic can't remember anything about. But because Killmer and Baalmann created Kinetic so long ago, Killmer said he can't remember who contributed what to the character.

"The origin of Kinetic is a mystery even to its creators," he said. "I think we were so excited about the idea that we forgot how it came about."

Although their passion for comic books unites them, Killmer said he and Baalmann draw inspiration for their characters from radically different sources.

Baalmann said his ideas feed off 1980s rock music, like Metallica, but also from his dreams. Killmer, on the other hand, said his creations are sparked by the world around him.

"The other day I was walking from the football field and randomly thought, 'What if there was a character that could obey cartoon physics?'" he said.

Killmer said he and Baalmann already imagine what it would be like to run their own publishing company based on their unique eccentricities like having dreams about their characters.

"They'll walk into my office and there will be a desk and a chair. They'll walk into [Baalmann's] office and there will be a bed, a night light and some milk."

In the last three years, Killmer said he and Baalmann have developed a business strategy for starting up their new publishing company and eventually diversifying into other media. Killmer said they hope to go beyond just comic books by one day expanding into publishing science fiction and fantasy magazines and books.

"Comic books can be just as important, if not more, than other literature," he said.

Focus on the market

Glen Giboney, director of the Small Business Development Center and a business professor, helps students and other community members like Baalmann and Killmer found their own businesses.

Giboney said he suggests Baalmann and Killmer study copyright laws to protect their creations. He said it is important to analyze the market to determine what consumers want from new comic books.

"Try to focus in on who is [in the]

market and what is the best way to reach these people," he said.

Giboney also said he suggests studying the competition.

"See what they have and [think about] how [you can] make [yours] enough different that people would want yours," he said.

The vision

When it's time for Killmer and Baalmann to start publishing their comic books, they said they will need to hire an artist. As of now, they only write scripts for their comic books, which are much like movie screenplays and include descriptions of the scene and the actions to give their future artist something to work with.

Neither Baalmann nor Killmer are fans of anime-style drawing, and they said they would want to team up with someone with an original comic drawing style.

Killmer said he only recently heard about senior Ellis Ray, whose dream job is to draw comic book characters.

Ray, a studio art major, said he has been drawing since he was little and took comic books more seriously in high school. Since then, he said he began collecting work to submit to professional artists and attends comic book conventions where he has had his work critiqued.

Marvel is a mainstream comic book publishing house that Ray said would be his ideal company to work for.

"I wouldn't be against doing independent work, but since I grew up with Spider-Man and X-Men, I would love to work with those kinds of characters," he said.

Networking and keeping in contact with professional artists is key to getting a job in the comic book business, Ray said.

"The more network I

build up with certain artists, the more inclined they will be to send work my way or recommend me for certain jobs," he said.

Although Ray said he has never met Killmer or Baalmann, he said he is happy to hear that other Truman students are interested in the comic book business and would be very interested in collaborating with them.

"I think it's awesome, and I would love to be a part of it," he said. "I kind of thought I was the only one, so to hear other people are doing it is pretty cool."

Ray said the characters he sketches usually are characters that already exist in the comic book universe. Rather than producing new, specific characters of his own, he said he will create ambiguous female and male characters to help reinforce the anatomical features of the characters.

"If I were to read Batman, I might draw Batman just to get myself to understand better what he looks like or what I think he should look like," he said.

The comic book business several decades ago is much different than what it has evolved to today, Ray said.

"Comic books are not a little kid medium anymore," he said. "People are tailoring comics more and more for a more mature reader. Give them a try – don't judge it until you actually look at it."

Additional reporting by Laura Prather

Current projects at MT Stories:

- Killmer and Baalmann are now in the process of:
- Fleshing out new villain characters.
 - Finishing the first issue of "Kinetic"
 - Creating a timeline of events.
 - Organizing story and character material.
 - Drafting an "umbrella" comic book series called "Gunmen," which will feature several characters in multiple interrelated storylines.



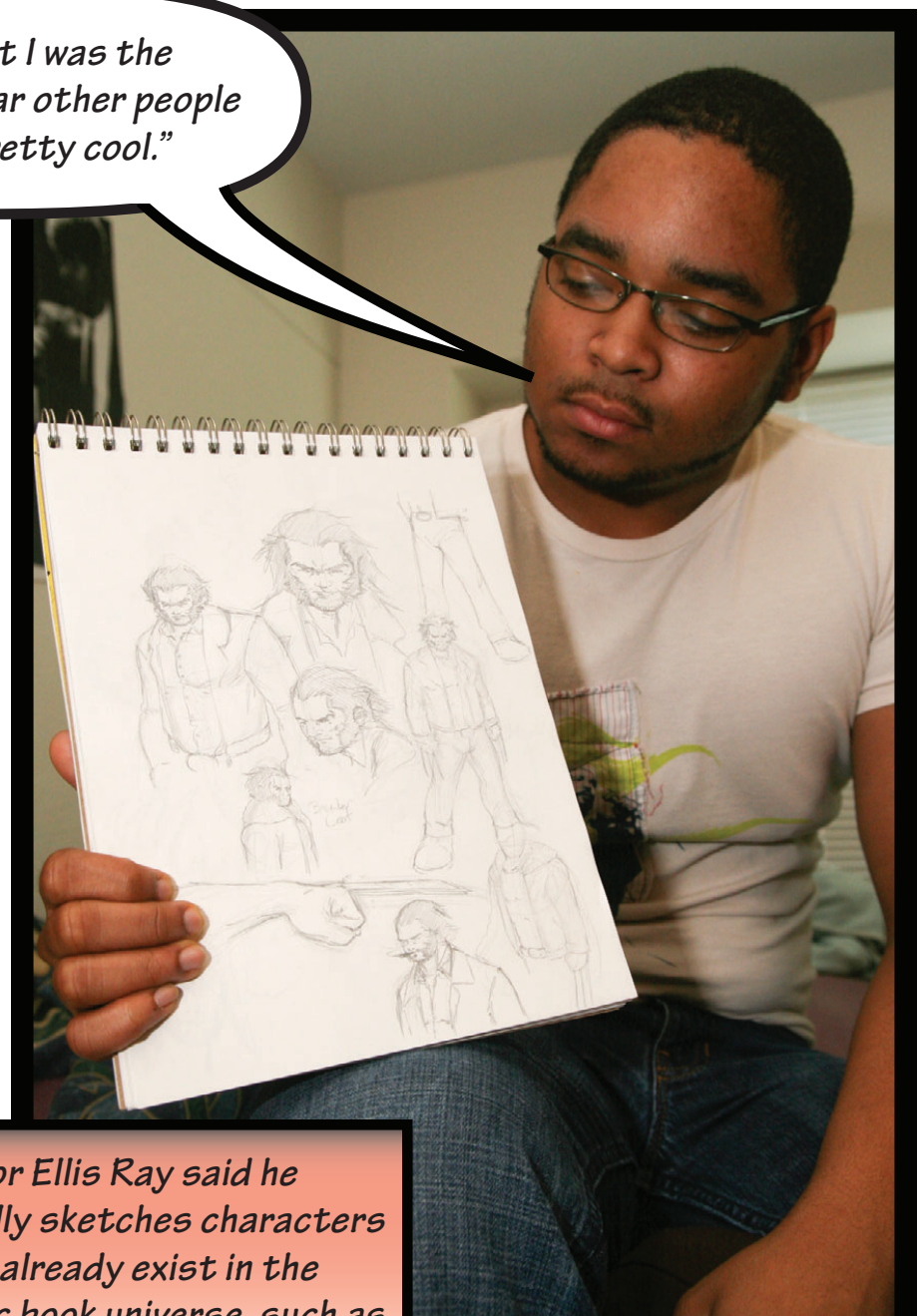
Kinetic

Real name: Erased from his memory

Powers: Can channel massive amounts of potential energy into himself, allowing for great feats of superhuman strength or speed.

Background: Kinetic is one of the Anti-Government Action Project's super soldier creations. After AGAP accidentally erased all memories of his past identity, Kinetic vowed to fight against everything AGAP stands for. Throughout his self-titled comic book series, Kinetic faces many of the supervillains created in the same explosion that bestowed his own powers.

"I kind of thought I was the only one, so to hear other people are doing it is pretty cool."



Senior Ellis Ray said he usually sketches characters that already exist in the comic book universe, such as characters from the X-Men.

"The other day I was walking from the football field and randomly thought, 'What if there was a character that could obey cartoon physics?'"



Sophomore Mark Killmer focuses on writing the comic book scripts and developing a business strategy.

Design by Nick Wilsey
Photos by Phil Jarrett
"Kinetic" illustration by Andrea Bailey,
"MT Stories" illustration by Dylan Herx/Index

Around The Ville

Full Night of Folklore

Come watch the Ballet Gran Folklórico de Mexico from Mexico City perform its music and dances from Mexican culture.



7:30 p.m. Wednesday
Baldwin
Pick up free ticket in SUB

Ethnic Eye-opener

Reserve a spot in Experience Ramadan, sponsored by the Muslim Students Association, and participate in the rituals of this holiday.

6:30 p.m. Sunday
Georgian Room in SUB
Free



A Pleasing Production

Truman's student theater department presents "Uncle Vonya" by Ukrainian playwright, Anton Pavlovich Chekhov.

8 p.m. Wednesday
through Saturday
James G. Severns Theater
Free

