

## Where were you in “’68”? Part One

Written by Jorge Solis

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Image Comics' '68 tells the hard-hitting story of an American platoon in the Vietnam War. Not only are these soldiers up against the jungle and sweltering heat, they also have to fight against a horde of zombies, who happen to be victims of war. FANGORIA spoke with author Mark Kidwell, artist Nat Jones and colorist Jay Fotos about how the project began and the tremendous collaborative effort it took to make '68 a best-selling hit.

**FANGORIA:** How did your careers in the comic book industry begin?

**MARK KIDWELL:** For me, it started with a weekend trip to Chicago's Wizard World show. I'd graduated from college with a BFA in illustration and design and was becoming exceedingly bored working in advertising. So I took a portfolio to the show and pitched it around for a couple of days. I came home with a penciling gig, an inking gig and a scripting gig. Didn't realize what I was getting myself into.



**NAT JONES:** I've been drawing most of my life, but it wasn't until high school that the idea of a career in comics started for me. I was already a huge fan of films, especially horror, but I wasn't

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really reading comics. By chance, I ended up at a mall, where a small comic convention was going on, and I started talking to the artists at the show. I walked into a store at the mall, bought a pad of paper and a pencil, then sat down and drew some samples. From those samples, I received my first professional work. Over the next few years, I worked my way through a long list of independent books until I landed SPAWN: THE DARK AGES when I was 23.

**JAY FOTOS:** Oh, boy, I could write a book here, but I’ll keep it short and sweet. I went to art school in New York City for illustration and design. Around 1997 is when I started working with Todd McFarlane on a bunch of SPAWN titles, which was my “comic book boot camp.” From there, it branched out into working with other publishers and what not; been doing it ever since.

**FANG:** How did the concept for ’68 begin? How did all three of you connect with the project?

**KIDWELL:** I was working on another zombie related book with a small publisher and came up with zombie-Vietnam idea. I was amazed that it hadn’t been done and searched everywhere for some inkling that it had. When I was satisfied that it was untapped, I pitched ’68’s first storyline to publisher Chazz DeMoss, and he green-lit it in the streets of Toronto, Canada. From there, Chazz got the script to Nat, he dug it and signed on to illustrate as well as bringing Jay into the mix on design and colors. From there on, it was magic; three horror fanatics doing whatever they wanted in the darkest world they could all imagine.

**JONES:** From the moment I read Mark’s script, I knew ’68 was something I wanted to be a part of. Mark’s concept was unlike any other zombie story I had ever read. In an industry overrun with zombie tales, Mark takes the zombie genre somewhere no one else ever has. After reading the script, I knew Jay would be perfect for ’68. He has an amazing eye for horror.

**FOTOS:** We all instantly clicked. Nat and I had been working together for years prior, and when we teamed up with Mark, we all knew we would be working together for years to come. It’s great to find guys on a creative level that all mesh together so well. It makes what we do more fun and keeps us energized.

**FANG:** There have been epic films about the Vietnam War, such as APOCALYPSE NOW and PLATOON. Mark, how did you know bringing the zombie genre along would capture a metaphor for the heart of darkness, which is a major theme in the story? Nat, was it difficult to illustrate

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both sides of war and horror? Jay, how did you color the panels knowing half the story is about war, and the other half is horror?

**KIDWELL:** Zombies are basically the darker side of us. Their cannibalistic nature is merely a commentary on our constant, rabid consumerism, and their rotted state is a deep nod toward our society’s social and moral decay. It’s like staring into a shrouded mirror and seeing something familiar, yet twisted (and hungry) peering back. The Vietnam War backdrop adds to that because our soldiers were already facing not only a vicious, relentless enemy, but also the moral testing of their own souls. It’s an interesting juxtaposition to pit the all-too real horrors of war against those of the supernatural. The readers will get to be the judges of what is more appalling.

**JONES:** No, it wasn’t difficult to illustrate both sides-nothing is more horrific than war.

**FOTOS:** I lean more toward a creepy tone with colors, but with the new series, I brought in “more color” to make things contrast a little sharper. ’68 is mostly set in the jungles of Vietnam, so we have a lot of greens, even more so with the military involved, so the blood reds really pop! But that’s not all that I do; I handle all the graphics, lettering and production to make sure we have a top-shelf product from cover to cover on all levels.

**FANG:** ’68 has lush jungle settings and military jargon spoken by the soldiers. How much research did you do?

**KIDWELL:** Tons! Like most people, we all had a smattering of Vietnam knowledge. We’ve seen all the movies. But, as we discovered, there’s a lot to that period of time. And ’68 focuses not only on the war, but the latter half of the decade itself, so we researched everything from military history to flower power. It was a concentrated group effort, with everyone involved working hard to bring mountains of interesting, obscure tidbits to the series. We even added an editorial page entitled “Incoming” that follows up every issue, sharing factual knowledge that we used to base the fictional action in ’68 on. We hold ourselves to a high standard in creating a living, breathing, realistic world for our zombie apocalypse. Then, after all the hard work is on the page, we get to burn it all down.

**JONES:** I look up reference for almost every page of art. The Vietnam era was so

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well-documented and you have to stay true to that. It is integral that we create an authentic setting to properly set the tone in the story.

**FOTOS:** Nat and I work pretty closely on the look of everything, and make sure to stay true to the historical elements.

TO BE CONTINUED



{comments on}