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TAKE 2

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Comics for cancer

At 13 years old, Michael Kaye didn't know anyone afflicted with cancer, but through sketches and imagination, he created Ulrius Joules, a comic character who is cured of cancer when a supernatural gem crashes through his window and transforms him into a superhero called AmphoMan.

More than 20 years later, after having his own cancer scare, Kaye turned AmphoMan into a comic book series.

Now, the 36-year-old Cooper City resident has decided to donate 25 cents per issue sold to the South Florida Affiliate of Susan G. Komen for the Cure, based in West Palm Beach.

As the AmphoMan story goes, souls trapped inside of gems start finding their way to modern-day Earth from a long-lost planet that was destroyed by a meteor. Joules, a marine biologist who lives in South Florida and works at a research lab trying to find a cure for cancer, is among the first people to find one of the gems: a green one containing the soul of a frog.

When activated by water, the gem fuses to Joules' forehead and transforms him into a cancer-free frogman, known as AmphoMan, a moniker formed from the words "amphibian," "H2O" and "man."

"When he discovered this gem and it cured him, he was ecstatic," Kaye said of the character.

Then Joules discovers that his cancer is only gone when he is AmphoMan and that there are other people finding gems and using their newfound abilities in destructive ways. "They're becoming like mutants. It's causing havoc," Kaye explained. "So he took it upon himself to kind of save peo-

ple."

Kaye first tried to publish AmphoMan at age 15, but when he brought the storyboard to a printer and learned it would cost him \$10,000, he retired his creations to a box in the garage. Not long after that, he sold the approximately 500 comic book titles he had collected.

He went on to study 3D computer animation and work as a graphic designer at BEACON TV, a South Florida station that is run by the Broward County School Board.

In 2008, at age 32, Kaye started collecting comic books again. That same year, he had two surgeries to remove melanoma from his back. "I felt like a steak on the table. You're getting cut up. And that was just a taste of what cancer could do to people," he said. "...I thought of the book and said, 'Well maybe I foresaw something in my future.'"

Within the next year or two, Kaye resurrected his drawings and storyboard and began reworking and expanding upon the AmphoMan story.

Because printing has become substantially less expensive over the past 20 years, publishing AmphoMan was no longer such a risk for Kaye.

The father of three published the first AmphoMan book in February 2012. It contained his original drawings and some of the same text he wrote as a teenager. By May of this year, he published eight more issues that continued the story and featured all-new but still hand-drawn graphics, and last month he published a remake of the first issue that better sets the stage for the other books.

"It's definitely something now that I'm more proud of than any of the



KAYE

books," Kaye said.

So far, he has printed a few hundred books. Earlier this year, he sold a sampling of the series to Tate's Comics in Lauderhill and did a book signing there.

Signed physical copies are currently available for \$6 and digital versions for \$1 at AmphoMan.com. Kaye is also working to grow his audience with the help of vintage, thrift and consignment shop Thriftarella's in Davie. In late August, the owners purchased a copy of the first AmphoMan title.

"We have known Mike Kaye for some time and always try to promote our customers and local community efforts," said co-owner Dominick Masi. "The sign-up sheet is at our register, and we have quite a few pre-orders."

In December, Kaye will do a signing at the shop, and Thriftarella's will match what he brings in for Komen for the Cure.

Kaye said he plans to present the first donation to the local affiliate of the organization in December and will continue doing so at the end of each year.

In addition to promoting AmphoMan, Kaye is creating issue 10 of what he anticipates will be a 100-book series.

"Sometimes it takes me months to make one book," he said. "It's just a hobby, so I don't want it to become work. I just enjoy drawing. It's kind of like stress relief for me."