

Drawn ^{to make} COMICS



Jorge Blas

"There's something about when you're drawing," says **Jorge Blas**. "You're connected to your art, and there's nothing else at that moment that comes in your way."

During his childhood in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, the carrier taught himself to draw, and he continued to develop his skills over time.

"I grew up with comics and cartoons. They became part of my life and it stayed with me," he said, adding that newspaper comics, comic books and television cartoons were a way to connect him to the U.S. mainland by exposing him to pop culture and helping him to learn English.

The Clearwater, FL Branch 2008 member entered the Postal Service as a casual 15 years ago in his hometown delivering to the west coast of the island, and eventually settled in Florida, where he applied to be a city carrier assistant in 2013.

A co-worker knew of his drawing talent and the following year recommended him to the branch's newsletter as someone who could contribute comics. He created a recurring comic strip about postal subjects called "Junk Mail."

A few years later, he began contemplating a public Facebook group. After some encouragement from carriers at NALC's 2018 national convention in Detroit, the Facebook group "Junk Mail Comics" went live that summer.

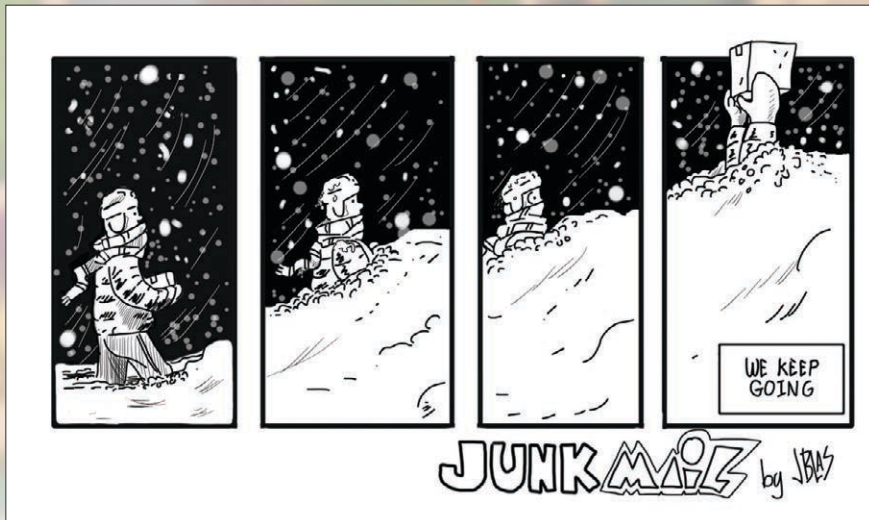
It was a way to share his work drawing and parodying carriers' daily struggles, but also to connect to others across the country. Blas soon began receiving suggestions from members for his comics. "I was getting little stories of funny things that would happen to different carriers," he said, "and all of a sudden, the group started growing."

The first year, he was drawing pretty much non-stop, he said, but he hit some speed bumps when the pandemic hit and he was working more when his office was short-staffed. He also got married, so "a little bit of life got in the way," Blas added.

These days he generally does a monthly comic to share on the 12,000-member group or in the branch newsletter. How long it takes to produce depends on a variety of factors, including whether it's a single- or multiple-panel comic strip, what he's drawing and what he's trying to express. "I could be really in the zone and I could pretty much finish it between an hour, an hour and a half, and I'm talking about have it all even in color," he said.

In October, he teamed up with fellow letter carrier comic artist **Terry Flippo** of Rockville, MD Branch 3825 to do an





event called “Inktober,” where they would take paid commissions to do spooky postal-themed comics. “He’s drawing some characters, and I’m drawing some characters,” Blas said.

Over time, the Junk Mail group evolved to become an outlet for carriers where people can post their own humorous TikTok videos and memes as well, Blas said.

He tries to keep it enjoyable and to avoid focusing on politics, though he does allow some posting of frustration with management. “It’s kind of like a constructive negativity,” he says—that way people can be like, “it’s not only my station.”

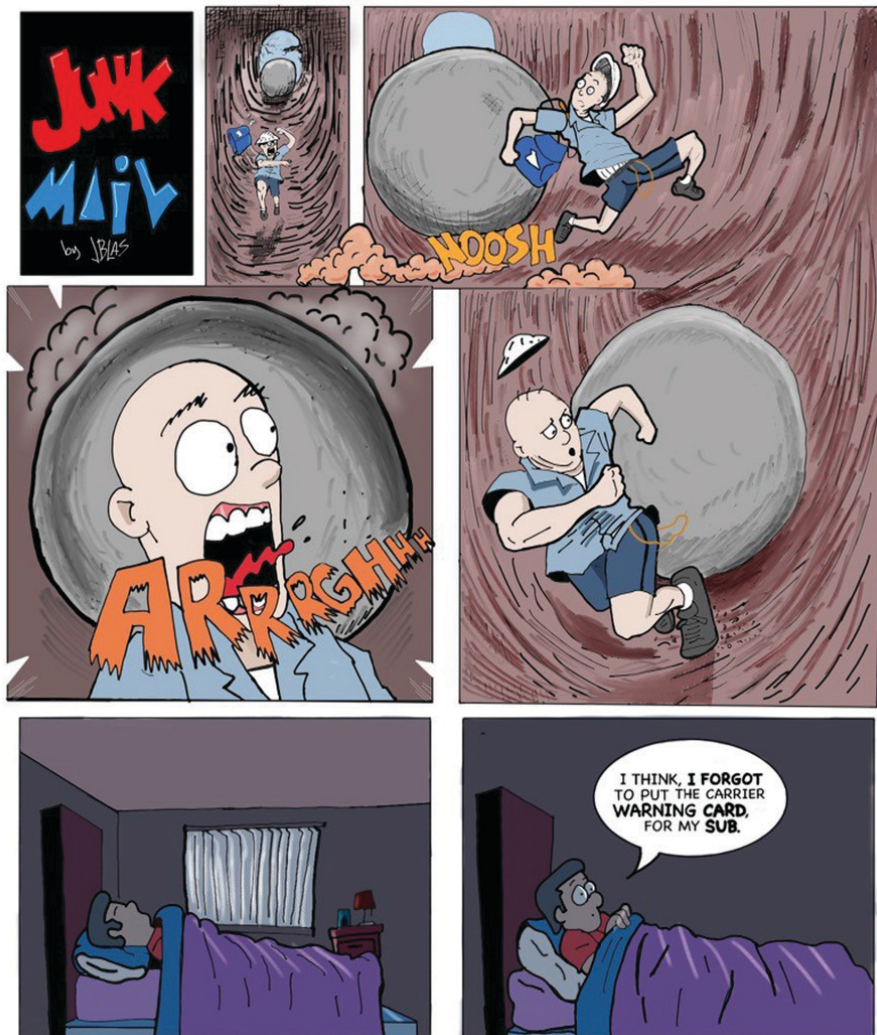
Blas served as a steward for seven years until 2020 and he bases some of his drawings on those experiences. He hopes that carriers sharing through the group feel comfortable and might even want to step up and become stewards to attempt to change any hostile work environment in their stations.

When Blas has frustrations about whatever happened at work, “I use my art to try to create something positive out of it,” he said.

Blas cites Marvel and DC Comics as being huge influences on his art. And someone from his branch once gave him a book of postal comics, *Out There* by Bakersfield, CA Branch 782 member **Fred Acedo**. “That was one of the inspirations to get me to draw post office cartoons,” Blas said.

“One of the things that I’ve noticed going through the history of the NALC is, ever since the Post Office was created, there were some type of cartoonists,” Blas said, adding that he and Flippo are just carrying on the tradition.

Inspiration for his comic strips can come from multiple sources. “I would say that 75 percent are stuff that happens to me,” said Blas, such as customer interaction or something that management would say. “I did a drawing one time where there was a service talk about not having toilet paper.”



Drawn to make comics



The other 25 percent is people reaching out to him with suggestions about events that happened to them. At times, Blas has to imagine something he's never experienced, such as wintery settings. "I started in Puerto Rico and then I moved to Florida, so I never really carry in the snow," he said.

He draws on his days off, or whenever he finds the time. If he's at work and comes up with an idea, he'll note it and start drawing it when he gets home.

"I work mostly with my iPad," he says, adding, "I can do traditional work, but because of my schedule, working digitally just makes me work faster."

As a kid, his dream was to draw comics, but it was a hard industry to get into. After turning to his Plan B of becoming a letter carrier, he now says that the two professions go "hand in hand."

One major goal Blas had was to draw a cover for *The Postal Record*, which he

achieved this month—readers can check out his festive artwork on the front of this magazine.

The carrier has many ideas of where to go with his art in the future, and he wants to continue to publish his work. "I will always try to look into other ventures," Blas said.

He hopes to further develop some of the characters he's worked on for his "Junk Mail" strip for years, either online or in a book.

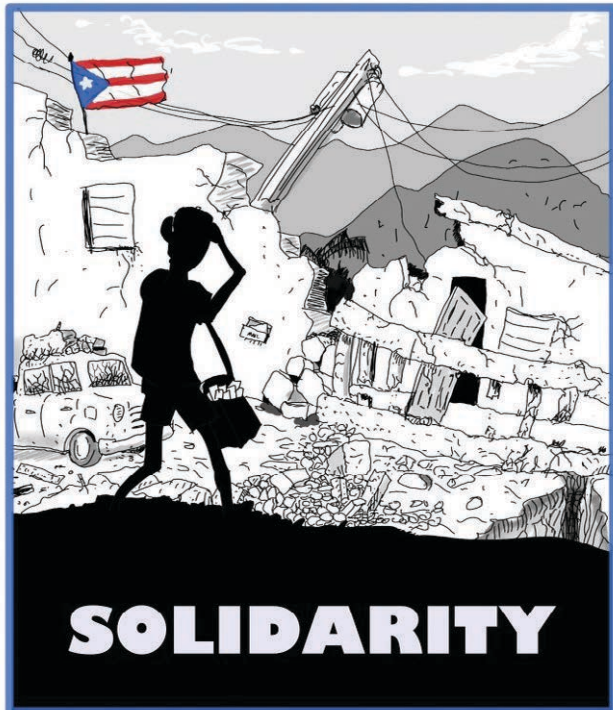
The sci-fi lover has two other projects in the works as well: monsters in the post office and a post office from outer space. "I'm designing the characters, working on the stories," he said.

Blas is exploring starting a Patreon—a platform that allows artists and creators to be compensated by subscribers—exclusive to postal cartoons, "so that way I'll be able to maybe get to do a book and have that available to any carrier," he said.

"I love to do this for free all my life, but art is art and at some point, you've got to get paid for your work," he added. That would help him to be able to produce a full-color book of his art.

In the meantime, Blas and his wife would like to transfer back to Puerto Rico to be near family and be of help in the community, although they are not sure when. "If that happens, it would be full circle," he said. **PR**

JUNK MAIL



Blas 2020