



IndieCreator: Insights from a Newbie Comic Creator & Other Industry Pros

This is the first in a series of bi-weekly columns about the travels and travails within indie comics by Bob Heske @ Heske Horror, creator of [The Night Projectionist](#) and [Cold Blooded Chillers](#). The first column focuses on my introduction to comics; the follow-up will be a primer on how to create a DIY horror comic series. To keep it fresh, I'll also interview other artists, bloggers, publishers, printers, LCS owners, and Web distributors.

Turning a Mid-life Crisis into Creative Lemonade

I never caught the comic book craze until I hit my forties. Some people run off with their secretaries. Others blow their cash on a sports car. Me? I get lost in comics and graphic novels. For my money, these are the best pure stories in any market (and, like my vintage sports card collection, classic comics are emerging as an investment value to boot).

Hollywood seems to agree as they've bankrolled many "superhero in tights" franchises and gritty graphic novels in recent years, and turned a pretty profit. Sin City, 300, American Splendor, Road to Perdition, A History of Violence, Ghost World, Hell Boy, X-Men, Spider Man, Superman, The Crow ... the list goes on. Despite the bottoming out of the global economy, comics, graphic novels, and animated creatures continue to draw an audience. Here are 2008's top money earners (Source: www.boxofficemojo.com):

| Rank | Movie Title (click to view) | Studio | Total Gross / Theaters | Opening / Theaters | Open | Close |
|------|--|----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-------|
| 1 | The Dark Knight | WB | \$533,345,358 4,366 | \$158,411,483 4,366 | 7/18 | 3/5 |
| 2 | Iron Man | Par. | \$318,412,101 4,154 | \$98,618,668 4,105 | 5/2 | 10/2 |
| 3 | Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull | Par. | \$317,101,119 4,264 | \$100,137,835 4,260 | 5/22 | 10/16 |
| 4 | Hancock | Sony | \$227,946,274 3,965 | \$62,603,879 3,965 | 7/2 | 9/7 |
| 5 | WALL-E | BV | \$223,808,164 3,992 | \$63,087,526 3,992 | 6/27 | 1/8 |
| 6 | Kung Fu Panda | P/DW | \$215,434,591 4,136 | \$60,239,130 4,114 | 6/6 | 10/9 |
| 7 | Twilight | Sum. | \$191,465,414 3,649 | \$69,637,740 3,419 | 11/21 | 4/2 |
| 8 | Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa | P/DW | \$180,010,950 4,065 | \$63,106,589 4,056 | 11/7 | 2/26 |
| 9 | Quantum of Solace | Sony | \$168,368,427 3,501 | \$67,528,882 3,451 | 11/14 | 1/25 |
| 10 | Dr. Seuss' Horton Hears a Who! | Fox | \$154,529,439 3,961 | \$45,012,998 3,954 | 3/14 | 9/4 |

Note that *The Dark Knight* and *Iron Man* are a formidable 1-2 punch, raking in \$850 million in US ticket sales (and well North of \$1 billion worldwide). One could argue that all ten titles feature “super hero” protagonists (yes, even boyish vampires can be heroic if they rescue a pretty girl). And let’s not forget *The Incredible Hulk* redux which came in at #17, earning \$135 mil in green.

Full disclosure: I am a terrible investor. I sold my baseball card collection fresh out of college – right before the collector’s boom of the mid-1980s. Then I spent the next fifteen years building it back up in time for today’s recession where a dealer told me I could get 25 cents on the dollar based on book value. (Since I have two daughters, I was tempted to sell my collection to fund my indie comic venture.)

Hopefully, my past performance is not indicative of future results. My fingers are crossed that I have entered the comics arena at the right place and the right time ...

How a Wannabe Screenwriter Turned Indie Comic Creator

For over a decade I tried to break into the Hollywood market. The best I could do was option a few scripts (features and shorts), and win a handful (okay, two fingers) of screenwriting contests. Then one day, after finishing a rewrite of an animated animal/martial arts tale (it never got made), I pitched an idea for a vampire tale to the producer who hired me. “Sounds interesting, send me the treatment.” I spent a few weeks getting the story outline out of my head and onto paper. After several months the producer emailed me back: “I read your treatment. I think it will make a **great comic.**”



Funny how people see stories in different lights. With my screenwriter background, I’d failed to come up with a tight script for this vampire tale. Yet, when I was forced to write a treatment, the story resonated as a completely different artform (paper instead of celluloid).

The story is called *The Night Projectionist*. [Studio 407](#), the indie publishing company who picked up the property, pitches it as “*30 Days of Night* meets *Scream*.” The premise is: The night projectionist at a condemned theater takes his audience hostage on Halloween eve as vampires descend upon the town. When the captive audience discovers the projectionist is also a vampire who has escaped the coven, they must fight for survival until dawn. But two critical questions remain: why did the night projectionist leave his coven, and is he friend or foe?

I've written many film scripts. Let me tell you something. Writing a quality comic story is not easier. In many ways it's harder. Writing film scripts, you can be looser in your description (directors find it annoying when writers provide camera angles in scripts). But when writing scripts for artists, they want as much panel-by-panel input as possible so they don't have to re-draw the darn thing over and over again.

Speaking of "do-overs," I spent over 200 hours writing *The Night Projectionist* series for Studio 407 and completed 5 to 8 drafts for each of the 4 standalone issues in the series. By the way, that's another difference in writing for comics vs. film. Film follows a classic 3-act structure (beginning, middle, and end) whereas a comic trade paperback is routinely comprised of 3-4 floppies – each with their own beginning/middle/end. Crafting *The Night Projectionist* with input from Alex Leung (Managing Director, Studio 407) and Chad Jones (Editor, and Author of *Netherworld*) was the most challenging and rewarding project I've written to date.



And here's the big irony ...

Myriad Pictures (*Kinsey*, *The Good Girl*, *Jeepers Creepers 2*) has a first-look deal with Studio 407 and has optioned the series to be made into a film. With any luck a director will soon be attached and funding and a star will follow. For those of you pessimists who say "Good luck finding money in these tough economic times" ... film sales are up 17.5% this year according to a [New York Times](#) article. A good chunk of change has come from *Watchmen* which has grossed over [\\$180 million](#) worldwide (a stellar film adaptation of the Alan Moore/Dave Gibbons graphic novel).

So, after years of trying to break into Hollywood I *may* have finally accomplished this goal via an unexpected and unintended route: **indie comics**. Go figure!

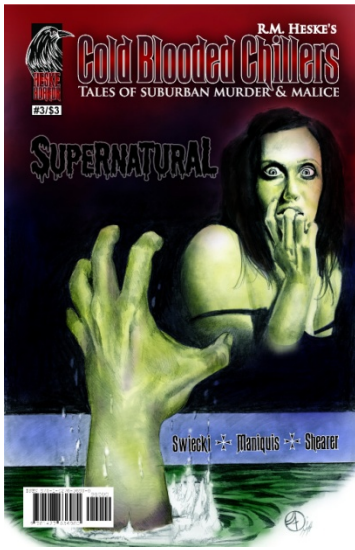
The Story Continues: Realizing a Second Dream

Okay, so all of that was two years ago. (Note to aspiring comic book creators: it takes a long time to write, draw, and produce a graphic novel. Keep your day job!)

How to keep the momentum going?

I had the good fortune of optioning a short script which was re-written by the director and recently produced as a short film called [Waiting](#) starring Richard Schiff and Izabella Miko. The film was very well done, had star actors and an Emmy-winning production crew ... but it wasn't true to my original vision. I decided rather than spend \$10K on

making my own short film – and have it suck (since I had no film production experience) – that I would take my comic writing experience from *The Night Projectionist* and parlay



it into a horror anthology series culled from several dark short scripts gathering dust in my sock drawer. With that same \$10,000 I was able to produce a 3-issue comic book series called *Cold Blooded Chillers*. I even had money left over to produce a “best of” trade paperback and [video trailer](#).

Thus far, sales are not ... well, “Watchmen-like.” But I’ll keep doing interviews, reviews, comic cons and the whole promotional thang.

The point is, in this “Do It Yourself” digital age you can get your comic book produced. You just need the drive and determination to get it out there. With any luck, you might even find a connection and have a shot at getting it made into a web film, short film, or feature.

If I can do it (albeit, at the ripe age of mid-forty), so can you!

In the next column, I will share my experience on creating and distributing a comic book, describe how to find artists, printers, distributors, as well as suggest some marketing tips. And I’ll give you a ballpark estimate of how much it costs to complete all of the above from concept to saddle-stitched floppy.

Until then, keep creating and keep pursuing your dream.

Yours cruelly,

R.M. Heske
HESKE HORROR

Horror Investment Tip from Jay Katz

InvestComics founder Jay Katz offers this tip on collecting vintage horror comics: “I have an old 1st artwork by [Bernie Wrightson](#) – he’s the Picasso of horror. His first professional work can be found in *House of Mystery* #179 (1968, cover by [Neal Adams](#)), and a good-looking copy would run for \$20-25. Considering the comic is over 40 years old, this is a great buy!”



Bob Heske is a screamwriter and graphic novelist with [IMDB](#) film credits, multiple short and feature screenplay options. Bob is creator of [The Night Projectionist](#), a vampire horror series by publisher [Studio 407](#) with film rights optioned by [Myriad Pictures](#). Through his Heske Horror shingle, Bob has self-published his critically acclaimed horror series [Cold Blooded Chillers](#) and [Bone Chiller](#) trade paperback. Bob’s works are available online at [ComixPress](#), [IndyPlanet](#), [HeavyInk](#), [SmallZone](#) and [DriveThruComics](#). You can email him at info@coldbloodedchillers.com.