



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

This is a series of bi-weekly columns by Bob Heske @ Heske Horror, creator of [The Night Projectionist](#) and [Cold Blooded Chillers](#), featuring interviews and insights from indie comic artists, writers, creators, distributors and visionaries.

10 Questions with Crawford Coutts @ Insomnia Publications

Crawford Coutts is Managing Director of Edinburgh-based Insomnia Publications Ltd., what began as a small self-publishing outfit in 2006 and has grown to become one of leading independent publishing companies in the UK with more than 35 titles in production. Many of Insomnia's creators have worked for Marvel, DC, 2000AD, Image, DC Thomson & Co. Ltd. Heavy Metal, Imagine FX, IDW, Rockstar Games, Caliber Comics, BBC and Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. All of Insomnia's products are creator-owned featuring established writer/artist/colorist teams as well as emerging talent who will put a new face on the industry going forward.

“We've received huge interest from key industry figures such as Alan Grant, Ben Templesmith, Frank Quitely, Gary Erskine and Bryan Talbot amongst many others,” says Mr. Coutts, an artist himself, who feels fortunate to call indie comics his full-time job. “I'm very lucky to have a very supportive partner, Audrey, who puts up with my 14+ hour working days, locking myself in the office; a hugely motivated and passionate management team; and a family of over 150 incredibly talented creators to help make it all happen!”

And indie comic fans are lucky indeed to see the fruits of Crawford's vision come to life in trade paperback. For the full monty on Crawford's UK company, read on:



- 1. Studio 407 and Insomnia Publications are two of my favorite indie comic creators. Tell us what makes you so cutting edge? And how did you come up with such a cool name?*

(CC:) I can't really speak for Studio 407 but I do believe they have some pretty impressive titles, one in particular called “The Night Projectionist” springs to mind ;-)

There are two big factors which make us different to a traditional comic publishing company:

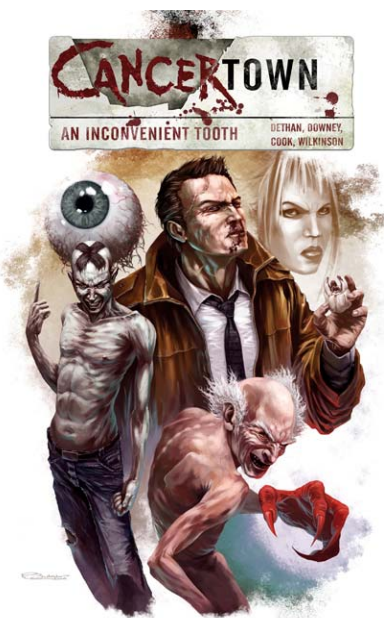
- **Looking out for Creators** – We put our creators first, they are an important and integral part of the company; without them we wouldn't have any books and without books we wouldn't have a company. Our creators are part of the “Insomnia family” (I know, it sounds like we're gangsters or something – capiche?). Our management team were (and some still are) creators so we appreciate that working on projects can be difficult and nerve-wracking, especially fitting this around other commitments. We try to accommodate every one of our creators and work with them to produce a very high-quality book in a time-frame that is realistic.
- **New Art, New Writing, New Concepts** – We produce a wide range of Urban Fantasy, Sci-Fi and Horror titles. With each of our products, we look to publish something which is unusual, literate, challenging and thought provoking. Most of our books are aimed at teen/mature readers and most have an 18+ age rating so we're not limiting our content and restricting character development.

I'd always wanted to start up my own business; I wanted to call it something that would sum up what we produced – stories that will keep you up all night. I saw readers so gripped by our books they would need to keep reading until it was finished. Ironically, when I was studying at university, I experienced insomnia first hand; not only would the readers be up all night, but so would the creators! Hence, Insomnia Publications was born.



2. *What are some of your best-selling titles? Tell us their premise.*

(CC:) Our most recent and subsequently best-selling titles are *Cancertown*, *Cages* and *Layer Zero: Choices*.



Cancertown is written by Cy Dethan, with art by Stephen Downey, colours by Melanie Cook and letters by Nic Wilkinson. The premise: Vince Morley is a man with big problems and a brain tumour like a baby's fist, living with one foot in a monstrous alternate world he calls Cancertown. When the lost and dispossessed of London start tripping over the same cracks in reality he spends his life avoiding, Morley realises he must confront the residents of Cancertown – and risk finding his place among them.

Cancertown features a stunning cover by Paul Cartwright and a foreword by comics legend Bryan Talbot. The latter says in his wonderful foreword, “We're seeing here the first outing of creators who will make their mark on the future comic industry.”

Cancertown will disorientate you, suck you in, chew you up and spit you out and you might well be in need of a change of underwear by the end. Don't say I didn't warn you."

Cages is written by Xander Bennett, with art by Cancertown colourist Melanie Cook.

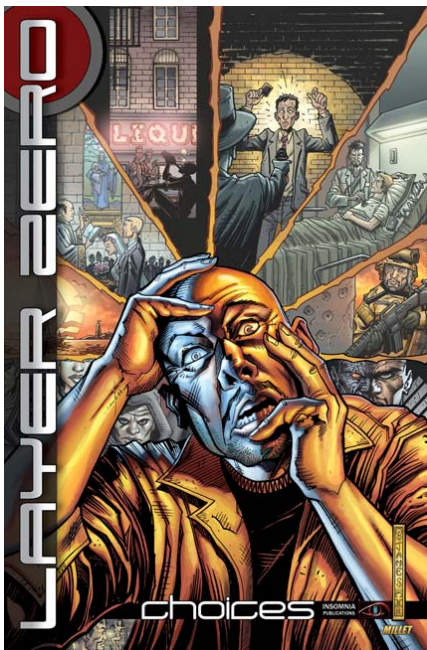
The premise: What if you'd spent your whole life in a cage, never glimpsing the world outside? What if everything you knew was darkness, fear and cold, clinical steel? What if one day an angel came to you with a message of hope – a message that you were about to be set free?

In a post-apocalyptic world of monsters, robots and mad science, three young fugitives strive to uncover the secrets behind their own mysterious abilities. *Cages* features a cover by the incredible Jonathan Hickman and a foreword by award-winning artist, Ben Templesmith.



3. *You also do a great anthology called Layer Zero.*

How has that fared? What are your favorite stories so far in the series?



(CC:) **Layer Zero** really helped start the ball rolling for us to find amazing talents like Cy Dethan and Paul Green who have since gone on to do incredible things. They landed work on the *Starship Troopers* license, and Paul also now draws the smash hit *Flash Gordon*. Thomas Mauer has worked for just about every indie publisher you could name, and has since gone on to co-run Kingdom comics at Disney.

Volumes 1 and 2 were collected into a trade last year which sold out in a couple of months. *Choices*, volume 3, which was released in May this year, is heading to the printers for a seconding printing in the next few weeks. Incidentally, the older volumes are now available from www.DriveThruComics.com. There's so many fantastic stories in each of the volumes that it's very hard for me to choose a favourite!

4. *Any plans to do other anthologies in the future?*

(CC:) Definitely! Anthologies are such a good place for creators to meet and experience working to deadlines with a couple of team members/editors. In fact, several of the *Layer Zero* creators have been signed up for work as writers or artists on full length graphic novels and mini-series with a number of publishers including Cy Dethan, Martin

Conaghan, Corey Brotherson, Christopher Barker, Steven Stone, Gary Crutchley, James Johnson, Matt Gibbs, Richard McAuliffe, Monty Borrer, Mark Chilcott and Kev Crossley.

We'll be continuing the *Layer Zero* series, releasing one edition per year with different themes. 2010 will see the launch of "Survival". We've actually had to increase the page count due to the number of submissions we received, and the book is now full. It's proving extremely popular on so many levels. Look out for a blog update (www.theredeye.co.uk) on what's included in the near future. The 2011 Layer Zero will be "Exile".

5. *Some in the industry are leaning more toward graphic novels versus monthly/quarterly serial comics. Where do you stand?*

(CC:) Insomnia publishes "instant trades" or "albums" of all our books rather than any floppies or on-going series. This decision springs mainly from our focus on creators and our desire to deliver something different. Neither of these things will work with a "floppies" model for a smaller publisher because different is understandably scary to readers and retailers on tight budgets, and monthly schedules are practically impossible for newer creators with other commitments.

Both of those things contribute to a vicious circle that mean, in effect, you already have to be successful to be successful; retailers already need to know your books sell to try and sell your books; and readers already need to know your work to know they want your work a try.

The changes in media consumption and buying habits means going "straight to trade" works with these trends. The story is complete when it hits the shelves, so in effect, the creators are happy to see their title finished and in print, retailers are more willing to try out new books, and readers are keen to give a new title a look.

6. *You sent me some great talent for my upcoming 2012 anthology. Where do you find these people?*

(CC:) There's such a vast amount of amazing talent around the world and so many are struggling to find an outlet for their creativity. We encourage creators who want to do something different to submit to us and we will build up strong teams and help them produce a first-rate book. Freedom from the 24-page monthly format gives us access to creators who want more space and scope to experiment beyond these conventions. Incidentally, one of main reasons we go to cons is to meet new creative talent.

7. *Give us 5 tips for creators who want to start their own indie comic book house.*

(CC:) Here you go:

1. **Do as much research as possible into the market** – Before you start, make yourself knowledgeable about what exists, what sells, how saturated a particular section is, what the competition is like in that sector, etc.
2. **Get a strong management team together** – People who are passionate about what they're doing and willing to work very hard and support what you set out to do.
3. **Make tough decisions** – If something isn't working, look at why and how and change it.
4. **Learn to sacrifice a lot** – Be very patient and live without sleep!
5. **Enjoy what you're doing and be creative** – It's a lot of effort so you have to keep it fun, interesting and challenging!

8. *How and where do you market Insomnia Publications? What vendors, websites, and comic cons do you use?*

(CC:) In the UK our titles are available in Waterstones, Borders and other good bookshops, most of the comic shops including Forbidden Planet International and available online from Amazon.co.uk.

In France our titles are available from Album and exclusively on sale from our independent stockist – Librairie Delvaux, 17 rue du Val, 77160, Provins.

During the course of a year we attend a number of Comic Cons, from Bristol to BICS along with running and attending many events such as Book Festivals, Gallery Exhibitions and Comic Festivals. To see the full list of Events for 2009 which is updated regularly visit: <http://www.insomniapublications.com/category/events/>

9. *Any plans to bring your books "across the pond" for US indie fans to enjoy?*

(CC:) Now that we're one of the largest Independents in the UK and we have a pretty solid grounding in the market, we're currently researching distribution avenues to tap into the North American market – speaking with various shops, distributors and shipping companies. By early 2010 readers will hopefully be able to purchase our books from many of the book stores and comic shops.

We're also considering various investment opportunities to help with our continued expansion, and later next year we hope to expand the business across to the US and Canada.

Free previews of our books are available on [MyEbook](#) and you can currently download a number of our titles from [DriveThruComics.com](#), with more to come in the near future.

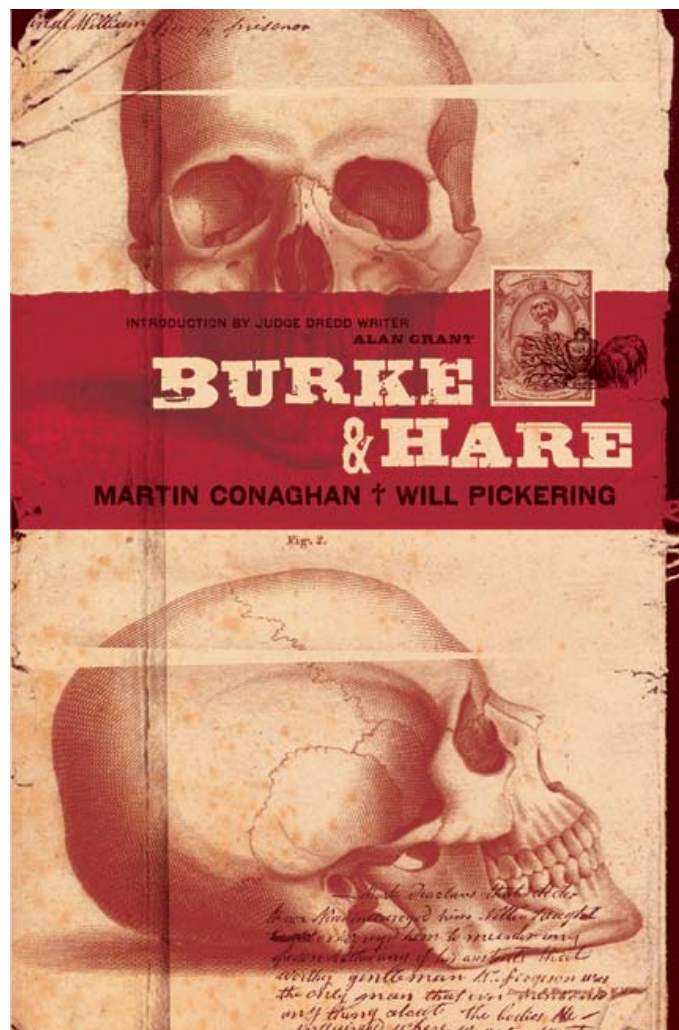
Of course our books can be bought for international delivery from various online stores. If you want an excellent personal service, try [Whatever Comics](#) who are not only a fantastic comic shop providing international shipping, but who are also the sponsors of *Cancertown*.

While I'm on the subject, any retailers reading this who would like to stock *Insomnia's* books should take a look at our [retailer FAQ](#) and get in touch with me directly to discuss your requirements.

10. *What do you have in store for the rest of 2009 and what's up your sleeves for next year? Finally, give us a few website and blog URLs where we can keep up with the latest happenings at Insomnia.*

(CC:) We've got another 3 books due out later this year, starting with our first art book, *MILK*, created by Stref which will be released in September. There will be 100 limited edition, signed and numbered copies available from the MILK Exhibition at the Fine Art Gallery in Edinburgh which runs for the whole of September, along with a small number of copies available from Amazon.

In October (just in time for Halloween) we're launching our first title from our new Bio-Graphic Novel imprint, *Vigil*, called *Burke and Hare* at the British International Comics Show (BICS). The book is completely research-based on the historical facts, written by Martin Conaghan, illustrated by Will Pickering, with letters by Paul McLaren and a cover by Rian Huges. The book also has a wonderful foreword from Alan Grant where he says, "Martin and Will have produced something of which they and their publisher – the relative newcomer, *Insomnia* – can be very proud. As well as being educational and entertaining, they've gone one better and given us something important. Hopefully, the Universe will ripple and change for a great many of their readers."



Burke & Hare premise: Over a 12 month period from 1827-1828 in Edinburgh, Scotland, two Irishmen by the names of William Burke and William Hare murdered 16 people and disposed of their bodies to the eminent dissectionist Dr Robert Knox at 10 Surgeon's Square. Delve into the murky, misquoted history of Scotland's most notorious serial killers with a research-based graphic novel that unravels a ghoulish story of medicine, murder and money. *Burke and Hare* also includes a gallery featuring, amongst others, Frank Quitely (*All-Star Superman*, *We3*, *The Authority*) and Gary Erksine (*Dan Dare*, *Jack Cross*, *JSA Strange Adventures*).

Earlier in the year we were approached by Sean Michael Wilson and Jeymes Samuel with a project titled, *Buskers*. It's an offbeat tale set in contemporary London with an array of odd but realistic characters. The comic book is based on a story by Jaymes Samuel (who incidentally is the brother of the singer SEAL), which is being created both in graphic novel form and as a film. *Buskers* is written by Sean Michael Wilson and is illustrated by Michiru Morikawa, an incredibly talented Japanese artist who won the International Manga and Anime Festival Award a few years back. Jeymes is currently working on the film version of *Buskers* with a cast including Kevin Spacey and Mos Def, and the different versions will complement each other.

Along with *Burke and Hare*, *Buskers* will be launched at BICS where we will have a very special edition of the book (signed and limited to 100 copies), including a "Buskers Demo CD," with previews of a number of songs from the incredible soundtrack by [The Bullitts](#).

In 2010, the first of *The Insomniac's Guides* will be released. These books are a lot like the bonus discs you get in some DVD packages, only in book form, expanding various Insomnia books. When talking about "Parasite Lost," Cy Dethan's new story in the *Insomniac's Guide to Cancertown*, he said, "It's an origin story of sorts: 12 pages of Crosshair-related mayhem and a troubled teenager strangling a cat on page one. Fun times ahead."

We're also planning on releasing 12 new graphic novels, and we hope to have our US operation up and running early next year. Amongst our usual conventions line-up, we'll be attending cons in Inverness, Chicago, New York and hopefully Toronto as well.

For our full list of books which are in development, visit <http://www.insomniapublications.com/about/book-list.html>

To view the events we're attending and running, keep an eye on: <http://www.insomniapublications.com/category/events/>

For more information on the company and our titles, please visit our official website: www.insomniapublications.com

Also, keep up to date with the latest news and developments every Monday at on our official blog www.theredeye.co.uk

Bonus Question: *If aliens showed up to destroy humanity, what 3 comics books would you give them to show we are an advanced species worth saving?*

(CC:) I could use this space to plug some of our titles but I think I've done enough of that already! The best comics would show an advanced species we are worth saving in terms of our artistic talent, but the subjects explored and characters depicted are not exactly showing the sunniest-side of humanity.

1. "Batman: Arkham Asylum" by Grant Morrison and Dave McKean
2. "30 Days of Night" by Steve Niles and Ben Templesmith
3. "The Red Star" by Christian Gossett

Bob Heske 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 self-published his critically acclaimed horror series [Cold Blooded Chillers](#). Bob's trade paperback [Bone Chiller](#) (a "best of" CBC anthology) recently won a Bronze medal in the horror category at the 2009 Independent Publisher Book Awards. He is currently working on an End Times anthology called "2012: Final Prayer." You can email him at info@coldbloodedchillers.com.