



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 Rod Lott @ Bookgasm.com

[Bookgasm.com](#) is one of those ultra hip literary review websites which make you darned glad the Internet exists. Proprietor Rod Lott manages the site, and a stable of smart, accomplished reviewers who know their stuff and who aren't timid to give a bad review if subpar material warrants it. This is a site for book lovers searching for the undiscovered literary gems, afterall (and a few well-known authors and titles to boot). What's really great is that Rod keeps the content fresh by adding new posts daily (OK, so he takes the weekends off) and mixing in some fun contests where you can win free books, DVDs or even a Kindle. He also was kind enough to write the Foreward for my indie horror anthology, BONE CHILLER.



During normal working hours, Rod is a corporate managing editor for an independent media company in Oklahoma City. Formerly the editor of *Hitch Magazine*, he started Bookgasm.com in 2005. Rod lives in Oklahoma City with his wife (a published author and staff reviewer), their three kids, and a serious lack of sleep.

1. What is "bookgasm" and, dare I ask – how did you come up with that name?

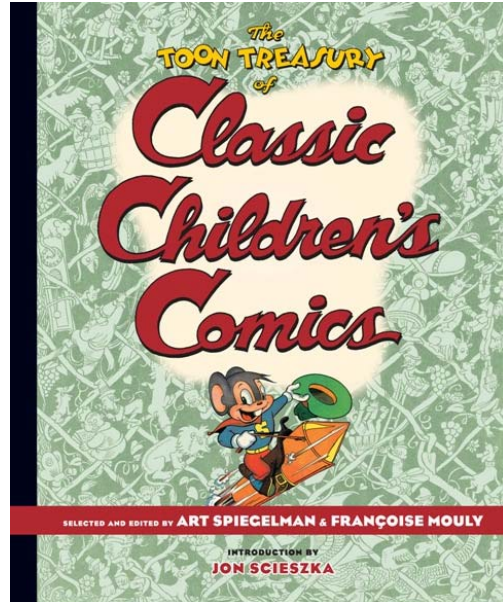
(ROD) "Bookgasm" was not my first choice for a site name, but the others were all taken! I had things on my list like "Book Whore" and "Book Slut." I wanted something edgy and memorable, but those URLs weren't available. After a little thinking, I just combined the words "book" and "orgasm" to describe that feeling you get inside when you either find a book in a store that really grabs your interest, or are really enjoying reading one.

I thought I was coining a new phrase, but it turns out that a couple of people on the Internet had already used the term. But I'll totally take credit for popularizing it, assuming it ever catches on. My wife hated the name when I told her. Absolutely hated it and was totally against it. I told her it would get people's attention. She said I'd never find the site blurbed in a book. A few months later, I proved her wrong. We have been blurbed in many books – even on the front

covers, and even from major publishers. I'm sure it's still a hurdle or a stumbling block for some, but if you're going to be offended by that, you're really going to be offended by other things we write.

2. Your tagline is "Reading material to get excited about." What recent books and graphic novels have excited you?

(ROD) As far as fiction, I really liked Lev Grossman's THE MAGICIANS and Anthony Zuiker and Duane Swierczynski's LEVEL 26 this fall. In nonfiction, David Grann's THE LOST CITY OF Z and Allison Hoover Bartlett's THE MAN WHO LOVED BOOKS TOO MUCH are the best so far this year.



But above all of them, nothings given me a bookgasm more in '09 than Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly's collection THE TOON TREASURY OF CLASSIC CHILDREN'S COMICS.

3. How do indie authors submit to bookgasm? Do you favor hard copy over electronic? How long does it take to post a review? And tell us about the "contests" feature.

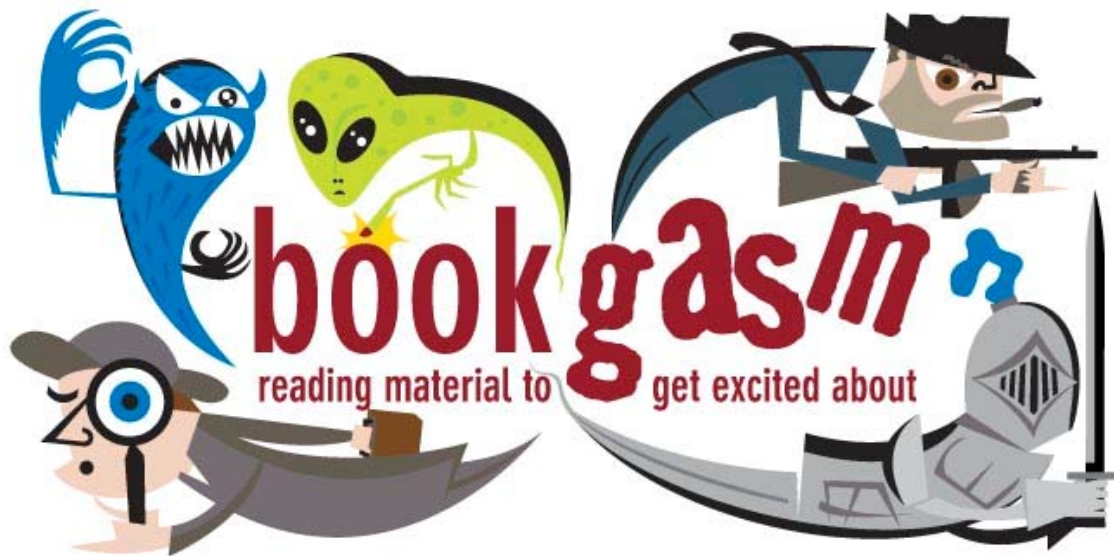
(ROD) Authors need to e-mail me at editor@bookgasm.com to query me, as long as it's among the genres we cover. If it's not, we're not interested, because that's not what the site is about. I don't want them to send books automatically, because I don't want to waste their time or money. I try to match a book to a reviewer I think will like it, but if that reviewer passes, we have to pass. It's nothing personal; it's just we all have limited time to read. As much as we'd like to cover everything, we can't. Yet.



I have to warn people, though: If the reviewer doesn't like the book, he's going to say so. Honesty in reviews is something I've been preaching since the start. If you don't ever have mixed or negative reviews, you have no credibility as a review site. Again, it's nothing personal. I had one author submit his book to us; we agreed to review it; and the reviewer hated it. And I mean HATED it. But his review wasn't mean-spirited; it was constructive criticism. The

author asked if we could take it down, which floored me. I refused, of course, but also nicely explained it's just one man's opinion, and that even bad press is good press, which I truly believe. Think about how many times you've read a bad

review of a book or a movie or a TV show, and you thought, “Well, it sounds good to me,” and checked it out? We all have.



4. Tell us about your talented stable of reviewers and interviewers. Where'd you get these guys?

(ROD) Several of them have been my close, personal friends for years. Like me, most of them are or have been professional journalists. Another used to write CD reviews for me when I ran *Hitch Magazine*. A few others I've never met in real life, but became reviewers after being heavy readers of the site. Oh, and I'm sleeping with one of them. Fortunately for my wife, it's my wife.

How long it takes for the review to appear just depends. Sometimes, I can read something instantly, and have a review up the next day. More often than not, it has to wait in the queue, not just to get reviewed, but to get read first. I literally have stacks upon stacks in my office, organized by month of release. Inevitably, I am always behind.

With very little exception, we're strictly hard copy people. I've yet to meet a reviewer who wants e-books or PDFs. I think that's mostly because none of them own an e-reader. For me, it's more a matter of that I have to sit in front of a computer screen all day long; when I want to read, it should be relaxing, so I like to put my feet up. I can't do that with a PDF. And you can't take that into a bathtub.

5. How do you get around to doing so much reading and still live a normal life? And how will bookgasm evolve toward the new Kindle "e-book" craze?

(ROD) I used to read a book a day. No more. Things are too busy with my work bleeding over into evenings and sometimes weekends, and I have a family I cannot ignore – not that I'd want to! I wish I had more time to read. When all the

kids are out of the house, that can probably happen, so look for things to really ramp up in 2022.

As for the Kindle, the site is now Kindle-friendly and only 99 cents a month through Amazon. I personally don't own a Kindle. I'm waiting for someone to just give me one. Actually, being an Apple loyalist, I'm more interested in the rumored Mac tablet, but I still prefer to hold an actual book. I like the way they feel, I like the way they smell.

6. What is your site traffic like? Do you generate any revenue? And how are those nifty freebie contests working for you?

(ROD) At our best days, usually toward our end-of-year coverage or whenever we have an item that's been heavily linked and/or re-tweeted on Twitter, we clear more than 10,000 unique visitors a day. On our days of lightest traffic, that drops to between 1,000 and 2,000. I remember in the site's first month or two, just being happy when we cracked 100!

We sell the occasional ad, which pays for hosting and those kind of things. I consider getting books to be payment enough. But if someone like Amazon wanted to buy me like they bought IMDb or something, I certainly would welcome that!

Contests are fun, not just because it drives people to the site, but because it makes Bookgasm feel more like a club, which was the intent all along. It's one way to interact with visitors and get them excited about it. Generally, we have one contest a week, but not always. The best contest we had was when HarperCollins provided an Amazon Kindle. Everyone wanted to be my best friend when that was going on.

7. You recently re-did the website. Tell us about some of the improvements.

(ROD) We streamlined the look because the previous version – although nice visually – was overloading the server. That got us kicked off one hosting company, so I wanted to avoid that experience again. Plus, with mobile devices, people care more about fast-loading content. You don't need bells and whistles as long as things are clearly organized. It works awesome on an iPhone now.

8. What new cool things can we expect from bookgasm in the future?

(ROD) More, I hope. Some days, it's really, really hard for me to find time to format even one review for the next day. Others, I'm a productivity machine. I'd love to have more hours to devote to it. For now, I should just be satisfied I've stuck to my vow to have new content every weekday. I couldn't do it alone.

9. Tell us about Rod Lott – who you are, what you’ve accomplished, and where you want to be in five years.

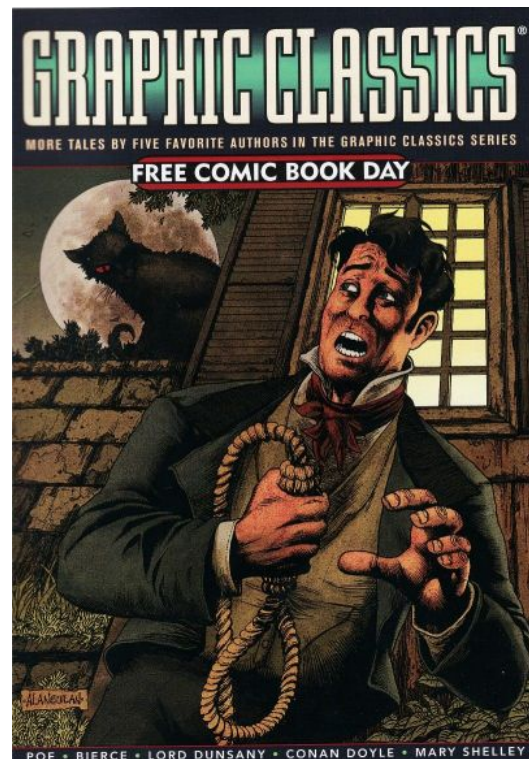
(ROD) I’m just a normal guy. I was one of those straight-A students growing up who sucked at sports, so I must fit the reader stereotype. I have a good job, but I’m most proud of my marriage. I know that sounds sappy, but I live in a state where half of them fail, and we’ve been going strong for 16 years now.

It helps that we both love the same things, like books and movies. She’s a published author, too. That was always her dream growing up, so it was a thrill to see that come true for her – so much so that it felt like it was happening to me, as well. We make pretty cute kids, too, but I’m now out of that business.

As for five years – hell, I just want to be alive.

10. Tell us about the stories you've adapted for Graphic Classics. Which were the most enjoyable and what story in particular was a real bear to adapt? Give us a website where we can pick these babies up!

(ROD) GRAPHIC CLASSICS is a fun series to be involved in, and I was a loyal reader before I became a contributor. I’ve been lucky to get to turn some of my favorite classic authors into comic book form, including H.G. Wells and Arthur Conan Doyle. The stories I’ve enjoyed adapting the most were the ones with a sense of humor, such as Edgar Allan Poe’s “Some Words with a Mummy” or H.P. Lovecraft’s “Sweet Ermengarde,” which is actually a comedy. We structured the story as a community college play, and that was a lot of fun to see on the page.



I also enjoyed the one original piece I got to do, in FANTASY CLASSICS. It was a very short intro based upon the famous dark and stormy night that resulted in Mary Shelley creating “Frankenstein” and John Polidori creating “The Vampire.” It directly led in to my adaptation of “Frankenstein,” which I’ll say was the hardest to adapt, just out of sheer length, not to mention intimidation.

You can get each edition at www.graphicclassics.com. Each one is worth buying, and I don’t get a penny of royalties, so I say that truthfully.

Bonus question – Suppose a tsunami were to wipe out the world in 2012. What 3 graphic novels would you bury in a bunker to show aliens that humans had a creative, entertaining soul?

(ROD) That's tough. The cliché would be to choose WATCHMEN or MAUS, but I'd just go with my personal favorites, which would include Alan Moore's THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN and SWAMP THING, and Neil Gaiman's THE SANDMAN.

Bob Heske is creator of [The Night Projectionist](#), a vampire OGN 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) won a Bronze medal in the horror category at the 2009 Independent Publisher Book Awards. He will release a much anticipated Doomsday anthology called "2012: Final Prayer" on 11/15/09. Email Bob at info@coldbloodedchillers.com.