

**IN THE
FRAME**

A COMICS CREATORS' RESOURCE



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INTRODUCTION

HELLO AND WELCOME TO IN THE FRAME.



This is a resource for Scotland-based comics creators at all stages of their careers. It can help you navigate some of the barriers around comics creation and give you valuable information on some of the technical and professional aspects of the industry.

The comics industry has enjoyed global success for generations. In Scotland, there is a rich sector from the grassroots to established and recognisable names. The innovation and creativity of creators in the Scottish sector is incalculable, but the nature of the work itself, which is largely contract-based and freelance, means that many creators are unable to access the information and connections they need to develop their work and connect it with a broad readership.

Enter In The Frame, a resource dedicated to supporting emerging comics creators, advising you on funding your creative process, and helping you to navigate the publishing landscape.

Designed to bring the voices of experts and established industry specialists to comics creators, In The Frame aims to bridge the gaps and dismantle the barriers surrounding this unique artform.

In this guide you will find a blend of both expert advice, and quotes from comics creators already working in the field, whose voices can help you navigate the road ahead of you. At the end of the guide, there is a list of further resources, from which you can learn more.

Alice Tarbuck



COMICS, CONTRACTS AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY:

SARAH BURTON AND HEATHER PARRY,
SOCIETY OF AUTHORS

COPYRIGHT

Copyright is a much-misunderstood issue, and one that's important to grasp when you're working as a writer. Here's a quick rundown of the basics to help you understand who holds the rights to your work – and how you can protect them.

WHAT IS COPYRIGHT?

Copyright is a type of intellectual property that protects original works of authorship that have been 'fixed' in a tangible form of expression.

When you create something, and write it down or record it, you are understood, legally, to be the author, and to hold the copyright for it. Copyright does not cover things like titles, names and slogans, or listings of things like ingredients, and it does not cover ideas. Those ideas have to be expressed creatively in a concrete format in order to be copyrighted.

WHAT DOES COPYRIGHT ALLOW?

Copyright allows you to license the work for payment, to publicly display the work, to perform it, to sell the rights, and to make derivative works. Owning copyright means you are the person who decides what is done with your work, whether that's selling the rights for it to be made into a Hollywood film or publishing it yourself as a limited-edition pamphlet.

WHO OWNS COPYRIGHT?

You own the copyright of any work that you create. It's important to note that you should remain the copyright owner even if your work becomes a published book, play, film, recording, etc. On the event of your death, the copyright of any work you created in your lifetime will pass to a named person, your literary executor.

HOW LONG DOES COPYRIGHT LAST?

In the UK, any literary, dramatic, musical or artistic work created since 1 August 1989 has a copyright term of the author's life plus seventy years. If you write a book today, copyright will last until seventy years after your death. You cannot copyright titles. Broadcasts, films and computer-generated works have a slightly different copyright term: fifty years from the date of creation (or the date of availability).

AM I REQUIRED TO GIVE MY COPYRIGHT AWAY?

A key point to understand is that if you receive payment for your work to be exploited – that is, for it to be turned into a book, a stage play, a radio broadcast, etc – you are not selling your copyright to that work. Rather, you're giving people the limited-time, exclusive right to use your work for those specific purposes. If you send a poem, for example, to a literary journal and they print that poem in return for a small payment, they do not own that poem. They have paid you for the rights to print it in that journal, and nothing more.

You can give up all of your rights in return for an amount of money, but you will still be recognised as the author of that work.

You can also read more in the Society of Author's [guide to copyright and permissions](#).



WHAT IS A CONTRACT?

In the most basic sense, a contract is a written agreement between two parties, signed and dated, detailing what is being agreed and to what purpose. As a writer, you will sign several contracts throughout your career – including, hopefully, a publishing contract.

If you are represented by an agent, they will take the lead in helping you to understand your contract – and they'll negotiate it on your behalf, in consultation with you. If you don't have an agent, this will fall to you – and in either instance it's a good idea to understand what you're signing. Make sure you take advice before signing any agreement.

WHAT DOES A PUBLISHING CONTRACT DO?

A publishing contract usually grants the publisher a licence to exploit a work (a manuscript you've written) within a specific set of parameters. These parameters are:

- **Territory** (e.g. the UK, the world, the world excluding USA, etc.)
- **Language** (e.g. English, all languages)
- **Formats and media** (e.g. as a printed book, as an eBook, as an audio recording, etc.)
- **Duration** (e.g. a year, ten years, etc.)
- **Publication schedule**
- **Percentage of royalties and the payment frequency**

The scope of these parameters should be determined by how much investment (for example, an advance on royalties) the publisher is making in the work. If a publisher wishes to hold world rights to your book, they should pay you more than if they just held the UK rights.

There are many more things that should be included in a contract, and you can read about these in the [Society of Authors' guide to contracts](#).

HOW DOES SERIAL PUBLICATION DIFFER?

If your contract is with a magazine, to publish a short story or essay, you will likely only grant them exclusive first serial rights for a period between six months and three years. This means that you will not be able to sell secondary publishing rights to that work for that period. This is why you must make sure you're being properly remunerated for any rights that you sign over.

WHAT SHOULD I WATCH OUT FOR IN A CONTRACT?

Some red flags to watch out for include:

- **No mention of payment to the author**
- **Lack of clarity around conditions or rights**
- **No detail about what the publisher will be doing or what processes they will undertake to support your book**

It's important to note that as well as traditional publishers, who pay you in exchange for the right to exploit that work within certain terms, there are other publishers who charge you money in order to produce your book for you.

Because you are contributing to – or even carrying – the cost of publication here, you should be incredibly careful what rights you are signing over and assess whether or not it is a good deal for you, compared to the possibility of self-publishing your work and retaining all control as well as 100% of the income.

Members of the Society of Authors can receive – and are encouraged to ask for – detailed advice on any contract they're offered. Their team of expert advisors can help you to understand what you're signing, and what it means for your rights. Find out more on the [Society of Authors website](#).

THE COMICS CREATORS NETWORK

The Comics Creators Network is a member-led online community, run through the Society of Authors, that offers professional support for all types of comics creators and graphic novelists in the UK.

WHAT CAN THE NETWORK DO FOR ME?

The *Comics Creators Network* was set up in 2020 to address challenges facing comics creators and advocate for better industry standards.

The Network is run entirely online and members can connect with each other using a **private Discord channel (email to join)**. Network members will also receive unlimited professional advice from our team of experts and free contract vetting as part of SoA membership – as well as **member discounts**, access to a **free tax helpline** from HW fisher, offers on **specialist insurance** and more.

We aim to:

- Empower comics creators with practical advice on all professional areas
- Develop professional practice with free events and webinars
- Negotiate fairer terms and agreements with publishers
- Advocate for better industry standards.



FUNDING FOR COMICS CREATORS

Alice Tarbuck is a Literature Officer for Creative Scotland.

Comics and graphic novels sit both within Literature and the Visual Arts. Comics can sometimes feel less visible than other sorts of books – and indeed, less visible than other artforms – despite Scotland’s rich culture of comics creation. As a result, some comics creators may feel unsure about applying for funding. However, we always invite comics creators to apply to Creative Scotland, and have proudly supported a number of comics and graphics novel projects over the years. These include Kate Charlesworth’s *Sensible Footwear*, Tom Humberstone’s *Suzanne: The Jazz Age Goddess of Tennis*, and David Lumsden’s *Boat*.

Creative Scotland distributes funding from two primary sources, the Scottish Government and the UK National Lottery. This funding is the means by which we support a portfolio of organisations across Scotland, as well as how we help with the development of individuals, funding ideas and projects, and how we deliver specific activity with partners. The fund you are most likely to apply to is the Open Fund for Individuals.

OPEN FUND FOR INDIVIDUALS

The Open Fund for Individuals is one of Creative Scotland’s key funding programmes, supporting the wide range of activity initiated by artists, writers, producers and other creative practitioners in Scotland. The overall budget for this fund in the financial year 2021/22 was £5 million.

- **Freelance and self-employed artists and creative practitioners living in Scotland who are at least 18 years old can apply.**
- **You can apply for between £500 and £100,000.**
- **There are no deadlines for this fund – you can apply year round.**

The Open Fund will support a period of research, development and/or delivery of creative activity for up to 24 months. We will ask you to tell us the start and end date for this activity and to describe the outcomes, benefits and impacts that you wish to achieve.

This fund is designed to support creative activity such as a specific project, production or a period of research and development. It can support an individual’s time where this is related to specific creative outcomes.

Applying for funding can feel daunting, which is why we suggest speaking with a Literature Officer at Creative Scotland prior to making an application. You can do this by emailing enquiries@creativescotland.com. We are always happy to speak with you concerning your prospective project!

You can also see the sorts of projects that we have funded before on our Literature Team Blog: [Creative Scotland Literature – Medium](#)

ROUTES TO PUBLICATION:

CASE STUDY: HEATHER PALMER

Heather Palmer is a writer based in Glasgow. Heather is the first comics winner of the Scottish Book Trust's New Writer Award (2019). She graduated from Edinburgh Napier's English and Film BA (Hons) in 2015 and self-published her first comic in 2016.

Her debut *Grave Wax*, created with artist Allan MacRitchie, is a mystery based on near-forgotten Scottish folklore and reacted to the culture surrounding the Scottish Independence Referendum. *Grave Wax* was shortlisted for Best Comic and Best Writer at the Scottish Independent Comic Book Awards in 2017 and 2018. In 2018, Heather's work was featured in 404 Ink and BHP Comics' *We Shall Fight Until We Win* and Frisson Comics' *Knock Knock* as well as in Scots translation in the *Scrieve!* Anthologie.

While most of my colleagues can trace their history with comics back to their very early years, I was seriously late to the game. My first comic wasn't *The Broons* or *Oor Wullie* but *The Dark Knight Returns* and it came to me from a university reading list.

It wasn't long before I found local comics fairs and met other local writers, all of whom encouraged me to join local comics writers group Glasgow League of Writers. Through GLoW, I met like-minded menace Allan MacRitchie and a year later we were going to print with our 20 page small-press comic, *Grave Wax*. We paid for the first print ourselves with our scraped recent-graduate funds. We signed

two copies of an extremely home-made contract which stated that we were equal co-owners of all *Grave Wax* intellectual property.

Forbidden Planet Glasgow helped us arrange a launch signing and somehow managed to convince people we didn't know to turn up for the book. We, in turn, turned ourselves out at events, signings and comic cons until we were part of the Glasgow comics community.

Over the next two years Allan and I continued to self-publish *Grave Wax*, with each issue now paying for the printing of the next. Our ethos with conventions has always been a hope to make the table money back and if we didn't, we'd just



paid the remainder to spend eight hours eating Jaffa Cakes and speaking with our friends. A bargain.

This method of publication is expensive up front and risks the original money you invest but it is a reliable and less emotionally taxing than crowd-funding or seeking public funding. With enough promotion, it can pay off.

While the art for *Grave Wax* was underway, I partnered with another Scottish artist, Kirsty Hunter, to create *Smithers&Wing*, a 60-page graphic novel and the biggest project for us both by far. With a quote from our trusty printer, we began creating a budget for a crowdfunder through Kickstarter. We took into account the best timing for our campaign, researching when campaigns do worst, what length of campaign works best and what to include as key information. We sent a preview of the comic for helpful quotes from friends with their own books and counted down the fifteen weeks to the launch by posting a page a week on Tapas.com and Tumblr for free, linking to the Kickstarter page and encouraging people to follow the page. Webcomics have huge audiences and often have an associated Patreon where people pay to read early. If *Smithers&Wing* had been a longer-running project, that's how we would have published.

After dedicating time to promoting the work and crowdfunding of our friends and peers, we were positive that they would reciprocate and we could create reach for our project. Our research, strategy, design work and planning came to fruition and we made our goals. We sent over 200 copies of *Smithers&Wing* to backers around the world and just scraped by with our contingency fund (10% added to the budget) after we paid for international shipping, printing, packaging and our nominal fees. We sent digital copies for review, listed it online and finally launched it in person at Thought Bubble Festival.

It was exhausting, but it was worth it – and that's small press comics in a nutshell.

TLDR; Turn up for everyone you can and celebrate the work of the people around you. If you get somewhere, turn around for the person behind you. Value your own work and don't give it out for free. Take feedback in the spirit in which it was given – good or bad. Scottish comics isn't perfect, but it's home.

FIVE TIPS FOR CROWDFUNDING:

PAVED WITH GOLD AGENCY

The number of comic books and graphic novels being funded on crowdfunding platforms is on the rise. In 2020 comics had a ground-breaking year on Kickstarter with over £16.5 million pledged to comics projects. Not just for well-known authors but for small artists as well.

Crowdfunding provides an opportunity to share your work with a wide audience and get their feedback and support. Although every campaign is different, they all have one thing in common: a story to tell. Nailing this story is the key to building a community that goes beyond crowdfunding and supports your work beyond the campaign itself.

CHOOSING YOUR PLATFORM

Think about what kind of crowdfunding would be best for your campaign and audience. There are 4 main types: reward, subscription, equity and donation.

Reward crowdfunding is probably the most common — these are the projects you'll find on Kickstarter, Crowdfunder & Indiegogo. In return for supporting your campaign, you offer your backers something in return.

Subscription crowdfunding models, like Patreon, work really well for ongoing projects. These allow backers to give small incremental donations over a period of time — either monthly or per “thing” — to support creators.

Each platform comes with its own pros and cons, so it's always best to do a bit of research into each one before choosing your direction.

PLANNING YOUR PROJECT

Once you've chosen your platform take plenty of time to really think about who your campaign is for, how long it's going to take to make and deliver it, and the key things that you want to tell people. Most platforms ask for a video, a project description, photography and rewards.

Having a strong, clear crowdfunding video is really important. It allows you to tell your story effectively and show people what you want to create. The video should ideally be about 2 minutes long.

Think clearly about how you want it to look and how you want people to feel when they are watching your video. A simple video of you **speaking to the camera** can be really effective, as long as it is carefully considered. Imagine explaining your project to a friend: how would you show them that you are prepared and capable of doing a great job?

The rest of the campaign page explains all these things in more detail. Showing more images, introducing your team, bringing in people who have worked with you before or happy customers. Your campaign should be clear and well-written, using lots of images to bring it to life.

Rewards are another important part of the story that you're creating. They should reflect your values and bring your backers closer to the project. Once you've got all these elements in place and your campaign page is looking smart, you're ready to share it with the world.

GET THE WORD OUT

This is sometimes the most overlooked element because sharing your work and asking people to support it can be really daunting. This is when having plenty of time really helps.

COMMUNITY

Start with people you know and think about how you can tell them about your new project.

If you want to build a community from scratch, think about where those people hang out.. Meet them in person to show them your work or build up a community online.

PARTNERSHIPS

You can collaborate with people who share your values to create rewards together or you could interview them to create compelling stories to share on social media. It will also give them something to share about you that isn't just about your project.

PRESS

This can seem really intimidating, but "press" doesn't have to mean the New York Times. Seek out small niche publications that suit your project. If your project has wide appeal, and it is, in fact, perfect for the New York Times, then seek out specific journalists who have shown interest in telling similar stories. Write them a personal email and link to everything they might need, including images.

INFLUENCERS

When we say "influencer", we mean someone who would be interested in your project and who has a voice in a community that you are trying to reach. If they have 1,000 avid followers for their specific niche, that's way more effective than 30,000 general folks. You could interview them for your social media or pitch to be interviewed by them.

CROWDFUNDING PLATFORMS

Much of the work you do will be what brings people to your campaign, but the platforms can also offer some support once your project is up and running.

Most platforms have a **variety of newsletters** for each category, some like Kickstarter are all editorially led with projects celebrated for good storytelling and ideas and not just the amount raised. So sometimes it's worth reaching out to their teams directly.

Paved with Gold is a crowdfunding agency based in London and Glasgow, run by Kaye Symington and Richard Ling.
www.pavedwithgold.co

DIVERSE VOICES IN COMICS:

QUOTES FROM HANNAH BERRY, WOODROW PHOENIX

Hannah Berry and Woodrow Phoenix talk about diversity in the comics industry.



WOODROW PHOENIX

It's probably one of the biggest ironies of a medium that's all about misfits and unusual, singular, weird and unclassifiable characters that in the UK and the US, comics publishing is a homogeneous monoculture, almost entirely populated by a legion of interchangeable white guys called Dave, Chris, Bob and Steve. And most of the protagonists that populate their fictional universes look like them, or idealised versions of them anyway. In 20+ years of working in European and North American comics, I have worked with exactly one man who was not white. And one Filipino woman. There was also the time I had lunch with a Black woman editorial assistant at DC Comics.

Working under these conditions meant I self-censored frequently. A script usually wouldn't mention the race of the protagonists. But it was not worth the hassle to draw them as anything but white. Friends, mums or dads, background characters, they could be black or brown. There would often be some editorial pushback but they'd get through. But the main protagonists? No chance.

I was on the other side of the desk, editing Nelson, the 53 person collaborative project for Blank Slate

Books in 2012. I told creators to consider making the protagonists people of colour. Think about your interactions, I said to them. What does the world look like outside? None of them had ever been told that before. Nelson turned out just fine. It even won awards for the density and diverse nature of its storytelling.

More inclusive comics happen when there are a broader range of people commissioning them as well as making them. This medium needs all the voices, ideas and life experiences it can get, from all kinds of people and places. It needs you and me writing about everyday things and extraordinary things from our perspective.

Let's get to work.

Woodrow Phoenix's award-winning work has appeared in national newspapers, magazines and books across the UK, Europe, the USA and Japan, and in television projects for Walt Disney and Cartoon Network.

In 2021 he was a mentor/contributor to Catalyst, an anthology from SelfMadeHero featuring eleven non-white and non-binary creators supported by an equally diverse editorial team.



HANNAH BERRY

I started making comics “professionally” when all this was fields. Well, that’s not quite accurate: there were the ghost towns of comics industry past, and there were new encampments springing up amongst the ruins. You might call it ‘2005’.

The ghost towns of yesteryear were largely built by ancient civilisations who connected before the internet, face to face, at conventions. Networking was usually done in the bar, forged along the lines of friendships, which inevitably meant opportunities went to people who had most in common with each other. Women and minority groups who became successful in these metropolises tended to do so in spite of, rather than as a result of, these networks.

Thankfully in these enlightened times we a) know the importance of representation, and b) have the internet; and so while things aren’t perfect, most of us are aware of the problem and are working towards solving it.

What we do not have is c) time travel: there is no way to reach back and support the careers of older generations of minority creators, and it shows – how many can you think of who are household names? And so, casting about for big female names to counterbalance the big male names, organisers have a far shorter list to go through before they reach...me.

I’m established, sure; I’ve done some notable work, yes, but I’m pretty aware

that my career and my accolades don’t quite marry up, and I often suspect I’ve been invited and spotlighted as a result of positive discrimination. It’s like having a starfish in your shoe: it doesn’t feel very nice, it really shouldn’t be there, and you have to walk around pretending it isn’t or people will cry foul.

But I almost never refuse these opportunities: I am very much the product of a scene that is trying to do better, and I want the scene to do better, and I know that by being visible I can let others know that the scene is trying to do better. I can be visible for the kids, and for the older ones who were pushed out before but might still be brought back into the fold now the time is right. If my temporary awkwardness signals to other queer, pencil-necked women in ties that they are welcome in comics, then it will have been worth it. Rise up, ya beauties.

Hannah Berry is an award-winning graphic novelist, comics creator, writer, illustrator and campaigner. She is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and was appointed UK Comics Laureate 2019-21. A regular guest of art, literature and comics festivals in the UK and around the world, her artwork has been exhibited in solo and collective exhibitions worldwide

THE AMERICAN STANDARD – A SHORT HISTORY OF COMICS IN SCOTLAND

SCOTTISH COMICS IN CONTEXT: SHA NAZIR


Over the last twelve years, 2010 – 2022, small press comics have grown exponentially, exploding with the arrival of new printing technology. Digital printing changed possibilities around making a comic affordably while presenting it in a standard American format. American comic book size is the industry standard for English-language comic books in North America and the UK. It is considered a mark of quality and authenticity to average and enthusiastic readers. Until the late 2000s, most small press creators were limited to A4 or A5 comics, the first too big and magazine-like and the latter too small and resembling fanzines or self-photocopied ashcan editions.

Digital printing changed this in terms of accessibility to the creator because of quality, format, and price. In mid-2011, it was possible to print a US format comic at 24 pages, black and white interiors and a full-colour cover, 100 copies for £134. For many self-publishing comic creators, this was a nexus point where experimentation began. The world opened to these new creators; they could make the ideas they wanted and hone their craft, not for immediate financial gain but because, in nearly all instances of starting to make

comics, for the love and joy of making it. This was the logic model for most small-pressers at this time.

A few options were beginning to emerge to print comics, too. One of those early innovators was Stuart Gould of UK Comics Creatives, followed by CPUK and Mixam. When I founded BHP Comics, we initially used the legendary Clydeside Press, a traditional printer based in Glasgow, known for its low-cost printing of socialist materials, placards and posters for protesters as well as band posters and occasionally small run book printing. In 1999, Clydeside printed the underground graphic novel *Strange Weather Lately* by Glasgow duo John Chalmers and Sandra de Marr (aka Metaphrog).

In the inception days of the small press boom 2008 – 2011, there was a swelling point of creators realising they could make and produce their ideas into reality with anything from 50 – 200 copies printed at a time. Early creators in the Scotland scene included Garry McLaughlins 'Laser Age Comics', Gary Chudleighs 'Or Comics', Jamie Grants' underground anthology 'Wasted', Rob Miller and Adam Smiths' works published under 'Braw books'



and the all-female anthology 'Team Girl Comics', and by 2011 followed Black Hearted Press (latterly renamed BHP Comics), had entered the scene.

Across the UK in the early 2010s, more small press creators made new books, but stigma and distribution were the main sticking points. There were more and more books being made but no more places to sell them. In 2011 BHP produced the first-ever Glasgow Comic Con, a modest event with 500 attendees and six small press exhibitors.

It was around 2013 when comic-con events became the principal distribution method for self-publishers. In Scotland, comic-cons rose from one in 2011 to fifteen by 2014. As of 2017, this had swollen into over 40 events across Scotland.

The growth of events and small press creators is a self-fulfilling cycle; more events produced require more tables to fill them. The more people are exposed to events where they see a culture of comics growing, which empowers more people believe they can do this themselves, creating more content and requiring more spaces to be filled. The most notable of all comics-focused shows in the UK is

Thought Bubble Festival (established 2007), one of the longest-running shows in the UK, with Glasgow Comic Con being the second-longest (established 2011), and the longest running in Scotland. There is still a lack of comics publishers in Scotland but in the past three years, a handful have risen alongside BHP: Blue Fox Comics, Quindrie Press and most recently ThirdBear Press. There is space in the market for new publishers, but overseas distribution has become more difficult post Brexit. However, the growth of talent and new stories within Scotland is growing year on year. It's only a matter of time before more stories are told and new readers are found.

Sha Nazir was the art director & publisher at BHP Comics, Scotland's only graphic novel publisher. He produces Glasgow Comic Con, Edinburgh Comic Art Festival and was the founding chair of the Scottish Independent Comic Book Alliance (SICBA) the UK's longest running comic book awards. He occasionally writes and draws comics.



FURTHER RESOURCES

The Society of Authors Comics Creators Group –
Comics Creators Network – The Society of Authors

University of Dundee **Events – Scottish Centre for
Comics Studies (scottishcomicstudies.com)**

BHP Comics: **BHP Comics: Expanding the culture
of comic books**

And you may also be interested in the results
of this recent survey:

UK Comics Creator Survey – Hannah Berry



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