# COMICS SURVIVAL KIT!

## PAUL ALLOR ON THE PERILS OF SELF-PUBLISHING

SUNDAY, JUNE 29, 2014

Paul Allor wrote one of my favorite recent small press comics, the wonderful ORC GIRL. Because I know very little about Self-Publishing, I asked friends who have been successful at it for their honest tips, and Paul's encouraging but sobering words here are absolutely essential. Thanks, Paul!

PAUL (ORC GIRL) ALLOR

Okay, let's get this out of the way up-front: the subtitle of this post should be "Self-Publishing Advice from a Guy Who's Lost a Whole Lot of Money Self-Publishing." If you want to know how to self-publish your comics in an economically viable, financially sustainable way, I'm not your guy. Because frankly, I think that's nearly impossible, unless you're an established creator (or a wizard!).

But if you're looking to self-publish as a way to get your work out there, and start to build a career, then we can talk. I'm going to assume that you already have a script, and the creative team is assembled, and everything is awesome. I'm also assuming that you're interested in a print comic, not just something web-based. Here are a few (woefully incomplete) thoughts on where you go from there.

**GET READY FOR SETBACKS**

Simply put, your self-published comics will take longer, cost more, and sell less than you think. There will be complications and delays and confusion. I can't offer much practical advice on responding to this, because everyone's particular set of complications will be different. But it's easier to take a punch when you know it's coming. So just keep your cool, stay professional and work through it. And know that everyone who self-publishes goes through similar challenges. You're not alone.

**CONTRACTS, CONTRACTS, CONTRACTS, ACK!**

The partnerships you form in self-publishing – with artists, writers, letterers, et cetera – are business relationships, and should be treated as such. That doesn't mean you can't be friends (lots of people are friends with their business associates), but it does mean that you should conduct yourself in a professional manner and that you should treat your collaborators with courtesy and respect, even during times of disagreement. And it also means that you should have contracts in place, to outline the nature of your relationship, to set down expectations for each member of the team, and to determine how revenue will be split amongst you

.That last one may sound silly, given how little money there is in self-publishing. But contracts aren't just for when things go wrong; they're also for when things go right. If your comic sells twenty copies, and is read only by friends and family, then you'll probably never need to turn to your contract. But if your comic becomes a self-publishing phenomenon, is picked up by a majorpublisher and eventually adapted into a major motion picture, then you'll be very happy to have a strong, clearly-written contract in place.

**USE AN EDITORR**

See what I did there?

**MAKE YOUR PRINTING DECISIONS EARLY**

You should talk to printers, and get quotes for printing, at the beginning of your project. There are a couple of reasons for this: first, I strongly suggest you create a budget for your project and to try to kind-of-sort-of mostly stick to it. You're going to want a separate column for your actual expenses, as opposed to your projected ones. Excel spreadsheets are your friend (and, on cold lonely nights, maybe even more than a friend). Printing (and don't forget shipping!) is a major expense, and will vary depending on the size of your print run (hint: you will drastically overestimate your sales), whether you choose digital vs. offset printing, your paper-stock and whether you self-cover, and a plethora of other factors, all of which could be an entire post of their own.

The other reason: you should know the format of your final comic before the script is written or the art is started. What size will your comic be? Will it be color or black and white? Do you plan to also put it on the web? You want to avoid creating a color comic, with small lettering and a 16-panel grid, only to discover that you can only afford to print it as a black-and-white mini-comic.

GET YOUR WORK OUT THERE

There are few things in life more nerve-wracking then waiting for your book to come back from the printers. And there are few things in life more wonderful than holding that book in your hands for the first time. It is a truly awesome feeling. But you made this comic to share with the world, not just to share with your cat. So your next step is getting it out there! Send it to editors and fellow creators; reach out to review sites; make it available digitally. Heck, put it online for free.

Some people might question whether this would cut into their sales. And to that I'd reply: Maaaaaaaybe? But I'll be honest with you, sales on a self-published comic from a relatively unknown creator are going to be so miniscule that the increased exposure is probably worth more, in the long run.

Like I said, I've lost a lot of money self-publishing comics. But I'm okay with that, and the reason I'm okay with that is that I see this self-published work as an investment in my future career. I plan on writing comics for a long time. And when I take those early losses, and amortizethem over a 20- or 30-year career, then suddenly they don't seem so bad.

Of course, it's also possible that the career will never happen. It's a risk. You have to decide whether it's worth investing in yourself*.

If you enjoyed this, I encourage you to follow me on Twitter, @PaulAllor, for more practical tipsand useful information. Ha! No, I'm kidding. It's mostly dumb jokes and self-promotion. But you should follow me anyway. And if anyone has any questions about this, feel free to hit me up there. I'm always happy to talk about comics.

* It Is.

Paul's website is: http://govtcomics.com/

55 Notes

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*This forum is a collection of short articles designed to help new, aspiring comics creators to navigate all aspects of the industry. The intention is to provide both practical and creative advice on a wide variety of topics, all from the minds of many of the best and most successful creators in comics.*

*It is curated by Gail Simone, writer of over 400 comics for publishers such as DC, Marvel, Bongo, Dynamite, Dark Horse, and many more. Her usual tumblr is: http://www.tumblr.com/blog/gailsimone*

*This forum would not be possible without the help and support of the many professionals who gave their time and expertise freely, to be used as a resource by anyone who so chooses.*

*Have fun, read some stuff, more articles on many different topics coming all the time!*

*Thank you very much to Gregory Hauenstein for the design and layout, and Courtney Meeker for her help in proofing and feedback!*

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