

What it takes to become a comic artist IN BANGLADESH

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In the bottomless pit of entertainment that we all seem to be sinking into, there are a few mediums that have not only stood the test of time but have also become the source of endless inspiration. In the last decade and even a few years beyond that, global box office numbers have been dominated by adaptations of comic book characters and their stories. And the numbers these adaptations have consistently attained over that period is a spectacle in and of itself.

While these trends have raised some questions regarding the state of pop culture and where it's headed, we must also be left to wonder how and why these narratives resonated with the audience on the scale that they did. Not everyone might have the same answer for it. However, there is no doubt that there is whimsy in the chaos of comic books. This same whimsy has also been prevalent in our own comics with some household titles being passed down and celebrated for generations. Inspired by the global impact of comics, coupled with a drive to tell our stories, the dream of becoming a comic artist has now become a reality in Bangladesh.

Fahim Anzoom Rumman, creator of *Nidranogor* and *Mofizuddin*, talks about how he started his journey. "I started right after I passed SSC. I got into *Rising Stars* as a cover artist but did not do any comics for them. Afterwards, when others saw my work, I was approached by Mighty Punch Studios. I worked on about five or six comics during my time there, mostly for the *Shabash* comic," he said.

"I'd say around the time when I was 14 or 15, I suddenly felt the urge to tell stories and make people laugh or gasp. I've been drawing ever since I was a baby but I never thought that I'd be pursuing comics," said Natasha Jahan, who also goes by Mohamaya Kandoo and is an HSC candidate from Siddheswari Girls College. "The very first step that I took was probably to get myself recognised by the comic community here. They encouraged me to send my work to newspapers which gave me the opportunity to draw comics for *Bangladesh Pratidin's* entertainment page," she added.

When asked about what he did to hone his skills, Fahim said that he practised drawing in large volumes since both the medium he works with (comic books and animation) requires a ton of drawings. This willingness to put in the effort and learn is vital for anyone who wishes to make it into the industry. After all, being a comic artist isn't merely constricted to just drawing. It also involves a lot of patience and discipline.

"It's the discipline that polishes your skills. A big part of being a cartoonist is just you sitting in front of your screen desk for hours like a shrimp just drawing panel after panel. You need to learn to create visually appealing characters, and backgrounds as well as be able to tell stories, script, and compose. You're not going to get there in one day," said Natasha.

"Be prepared to draw a lot. Comics come in various sizes. If one is not accustomed to drawing a lot in a given deadline, one will always have to draw short comics or remain in the anthology field. There is nothing wrong with that but if they want to draw their own series, they must be able to draw a lot," affirmed Fahim.

"Apart from drawing regularly, one should have both online and physical presence. Artists should showcase their work online so that they can grab the attention of publishers and newspapers. There are art groups on



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Facebook like "Cartoon People" and "Akantis" where they can post their work. Publishers could come across their work and even hire them," said Junaid Iqbal Ishmam, animator and illustrator at Mighty Punch Studios and game artist at Red Thorn Interactive. "Throughout the year, there are festivals, comic cons, exhibitions, and workshops arranged by different organisations. One should participate and show up to these programmes, and meet artists and publishers who are in the comic book publishing industry. This helps to know and get the opportunity to work with a lot of people."

The current comic community has fostered an environment that not only compels young artists to learn and grow on their own accord but also gives them the platform to attain professional experience. This ability to grant them such an opportunity has emerged due to the vast array of possibilities that the scene has been able to create.

"This industry is still growing. I am not going to say there are a lot of opportunities but there are plenty. Publishers understand the demand for comics. So, they are hiring comic book artists for different projects. They are also welcoming artists to publish their own stories," added Junaid. "Publishers like Dhaka Comics are welcoming and arranging opportunities every year for young artists to

publish their comics. The demand for comics in Boi Mela is also creating more avenues for comic book artists to work with different publications."

"Now is a great time for getting into publishing comics. Multiple outlets ask for submissions throughout the year such as Dhaka Comics. There is also Cartoon People who recently started drawing their own original comics. But that may be considered big leagues by people who are just starting out," said Fahim. "In which case a better outlet would be newspapers or a small-time publisher. Of course, there is nothing wrong with going for Dhaka Comics on the first go, but be ready for criticism, changes, or even outright rejection."

The current state of the comic book industry is inspiring, to say the least. With comic artists and writers given a wide array of opportunities, it is no wonder that a career as a comic book artist appears to be so enticing. And as a nation who have revelled in telling stories, it only seems natural that the youth is drawn to a medium that enables them to do just that. As consumers of stories, it is up to us to ensure that their stories are propelled to even greater heights and that passion is celebrated.

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