

# Noted comic book author Suleiman Bakhit passes away

---

JT [jordantimes.com/news/local/noted-comic-book-author-suleiman-bakhit-passes-away](http://jordantimes.com/news/local/noted-comic-book-author-suleiman-bakhit-passes-away)

August 17,  
2019

Autodidact renowned for creating superheroes inspired by Arab mythology

By Johanna Montanari - Aug 17,2019 - Last updated at Aug 17,2019



Suleiman Bakhit, Jordanian comic book author, created superheroes to fight against takfiri ideology (Photo courtesy of Oslo Freedom Forum website)

AMMAN — Suleiman Bakhit, Jordanian comic book author and son of former prime minister Marouf Bakhit, has passed away at the age of 41 while undergoing medical treatment in Spain following a long battle with cancer.

The artist created superheroes inspired by ancient Arab mythology. He fought against takfiri ideology with his comics, hoping to give young people in the Middle East better heroes than extremists. He also told stories that confronted discrimination faced by women.

Bakhit was an autodidact. In a portrait by The New York Times published in 2014, he said that he was studying a master's programme in human resource development at the University of Minnesota in 2011. On the day of the 9/11 attacks, before he even knew about

them, he received a call from his father. "He says, 'Suleiman, if anybody asks you your name, tell them you're José and you're from Mexico,'" Bakhit was quoted as saying. "I should have listened to him. Sometime afterwards, I got attacked by a group of men for no other reason than being an Arab."

In his speech at the 2014 Oslo Freedom Forum, Bakhit said that this attack prompted him to act and to raise awareness that not all Middle Easterners are terrorists. Eventually, Bakhit quit his master's programme and returned to Jordan to launch his comic book business.

In 2006, together with a team of writers and artists, he launched the comic book company Aranim Media Factory, Aranim being a fusion of the words "Arab" and "anime", with an initial grant from the King Abdullah II Fund for Development. All in all, Aranim sold over 1.2 million copies.

Some of Aranim's biggest hits were Element Zero, a kind of Arab James Bond character, and Princess Heart, a re-telling of the 1,001 Nights.

Bakhit was attacked with a razor blade by extremists in Jordan in 2008, leaving him with a scar down the left side of his face. "It's improved my dating life exponentially," he was quoted as saying in The New York Times.

He conducted field research among children in poor neighbourhoods in Amman and in Syrian refugee camps to gain an insight into what fuels terrorism.

"I went there and asked the kids, 'Who are your heroes?'" he was quoted as saying in The New York Times. "We don't have any heroes, but we hear a lot about Bin Laden, about Zarqawi," he said they told him, referring to the Jordanian militant Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, who led the group that evolved into Daesh.

In an interview with Vice in 2015, Bakhit said that the urge to join groups like Daesh seems to spring from issues of psychology rather than economy, or even theology: "Many people joining these groups aren't even very religious," he said. "This is much more about a sense of belonging, a sense of identity and a call to adventure... it's about narratives."

"The most important story humans have is the classic hero's journey. Right now, all governments are saying to kids is, 'Don't be a terrorist.' The extremists are saying, 'Be a hero.' It's obvious which narrative is stronger," he was quoted as saying, adding: "We need to claim that narrative space back."