



Australian Society of Authors

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March 2008: Graphic Novels / Comics Portfolio News

PRESS RELEASE: ASA Comics/Graphic Novel Portfolio

The Australian Society of Authors (ASA) recently formed a Comics/Graphic Novels Portfolio—an advocacy group that aims to provide industry support to Australian artists and writers currently working in the comics medium and, in particular, the graphic novel format.

The major objectives of the Portfolio are to:

- (1) Protect and promote the professional interests of comics creators (both writers and artists);
- (2) Form a professional community of active members who operate in this specialist discipline; and
- (3) Liaise and cross-pollinate ideas with like-minded Australian and overseas organisations whose focus is on the promotion of the comics art form.

Dr Jeremy Fisher, ASA Executive Director, says, *“The ASA wants to actively support a neglected (and often vulnerable) group of literary creators in the Australian comics/graphic novels community who have never had the opportunity to be part of a professional association or been exposed to prior formal or consistent intellectual property rights education before”*.

Dual portfolio holders Jozef Szekeres (artist) and Julie Ditrich (writer) of Black Mermaid Productions (www.blackmermaid.com) who contended with their own legal

challenges by a US comics publisher several years ago, proposed the idea for the portfolio because they wanted to prevent Australian comics creators from signing away their intellectual property rights. Julie Ditrich says, “*Several years ago the ASA contract advisor saved 22 of our original characters from extermination and being absorbed into an intellectual property owned by our then publisher, by insisting our contract contain a reversion of rights clause. We now want to return the favour to Australian comics creators and hopefully prevent them from going through a five year legal battle like we did*”.

Portfolio activities for 2008 include:

- Information and seminar sessions through WritingWA in Perth, and through Supanova, the pop culture expo, in Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney;
- Preparation of minimum approved ‘work-for-hire’ and ‘creator owned’ contracts for both comics publishers and mainstream book publishers;
- Preparation of Minimum Rates for comics writers, artists, colourists, inkers and letterers;
- Compilation of an online portfolio members’ Talent Register for comics writers, artists, colourists, inkers and letterers which will be promoted to publishers;
- Ongoing communication with portfolio members through the mechanisms of the ASA website, a regular column in the *ASA Newsletter*, as well as an upcoming e-zine highlighting opportunities, contract issues, training and events; and
- Compilation of resources aiding portfolio members to expand their business marketing skills.

Future activities include master classes, research into the Australian and overseas comics distribution model, formation of a printing cooperative for comics self-publishers, and research (as well as special deals for portfolio members) into print-on-demand technology.

Portfolio member and award winning writer/artist of The Arrival Shaun Tan says, “This is timely initiative given that a broad audience interest in comics and graphic novels is growing, and is keen to keep up with the enthusiasm and dedication of its

creators. From a professional point of view, such a portfolio can offer much needed support, business standards, and discussion forums for all artists, writers and publishers looking for some perspective in an extremely diverse field”.

The ASA has received enquiries about the portfolio from all over Australia, and membership is rapidly growing with some members already availing themselves of the ASA’s legal advice to resolve contract problems.

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