

# editor's note

About two years ago, I began building a comics collection at my library. I envisioned a separate collection that was browsable, well described and relevant to our unique users. I wanted the collection to be a substitute for a comic book shop – a resource that we sadly lack in Qatar. I secured a budget for acquisition, space for the collection, and the collaboration of a faculty member with an encyclopedic knowledge of comics. All that was left was to build the collection. How hard could it be?

It turns out, as with so many things, that I was a bit naïve when it comes to the particular challenges of comics librarianship. It's not that there is one aspect of building a comics collection is all that problematic. It is more that comics hit on many aspects that can make them challenging to not only acquire but also describe in the systems we have built our libraries around. The floppy comic books themselves are usually considered serials, but these are often repackaged in trade paperbacks, which are released in runs of their own. Sometimes one comic book can be included in many different trade paperbacks, omnibuses, and other collective editions. Some trade paperbacks stay in print for a long time, while others go out of print quickly, becoming difficult (and expensive) to obtain in the out-of-print market. A title run of a comic can last for decades, with dozens of authors, artists, inkers, and letters contributing to a title.

Although many of the most popular titles are available through traditional library vendors, a significant number of titles are put out by small presses that may be missed by library slip plans. Additionally, in recent years, there have been trends toward self-publishing or crowd-funding comic projects, with many established authors and artists finding it an acceptable alternative to working with large publishing houses. Although I'm sure such arrangements benefit the comic creators, they can create challenges to libraries attempting to identify and acquire items for a collection.

In this special issue of *Art libraries journal* on comic and sequential art, the included articles discuss not only the pragmatic aspects of adding comic and sequential art to a collection but also some of the reasons for doing so. In a Viewpoint article, "Some comics that made me and some comics that I made," André Trantraal, a comics author and artist, describes the role of comics and libraries played in his life growing up in apartheid South Africa. Trantraal's essay is a poignant reminder of how impactful a comic book in a library's collection can be.

Allison Bailund, Steven W. Holloway, Kayla Kuni and Deborah Tomaras take on the more pragmatic aspects of cataloging a comics collection in their article "Reprints, reboots and retcons: standardizing comics cataloging with the *Best practices* guide from the GNCRT." The article discusses the "Best practices for cataloging comics and graphic novels using RDA and MARC21" guide they developed as part of the American Library Association's Graphic Novels and Comics Roundtable Metadata and Cataloging Committee. After what must have been a massive effort, the committee published the 172-page guide last September. Their article summarizes some major aspects of the guide and the authors' hope that it will help standardize comics cataloging and ultimately improve patron access to comics.

In "Stretch goals: Launching crowdfunded comics collections in academic libraries," authors Mara Thacker and Jason Larsen discuss a project to systematically acquire crowd-funded comics at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. In the article, they not only discuss the challenges of acquiring crowd-funded comics but also the importance of doing so, especially when attempting to build inclusive collections.

Sean Petiya, in his article “A Linked Open Data model for describing comic book sequences: Exploring semantic enrichment opportunities with graphic medicine,” proposed that employing a LOD model in comic book description could increase discoverability through terms not typically associated with comics. He said this approach could be especially beneficial when applied to comics that deal with physical or mental health care.

And finally, in “Interrogating representations of transgressive women: Using critical information literacy and comic books in the Shakespeare classroom,” authors Susanne F. Paterson and Carolyn White Gamtso discuss a collaboration between an English faculty member and a faculty instruction librarian that used primary historical material as well as works of contemporary graphic fiction in an exercise that had students explore representations of women portrayed in *Macbeth*.

I would like to thank all the authors for contributing to this special issue. I’ve learned a great deal from assembling the contents of this issue, and I hope to include more content on comic librarianship in future issues.

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Michael Wirtz