Interview with Steven Sanders
(interview conducted by Alan Chorney and Danielle Hubbard)

Teens love comic books and graphic novels. They love drawing characters and settings from these resources, and creating stories with their own unique take on the superhero world. This is all well and good when done for personal use, but if the teen wishes to publish their material, they will immediately run into copyright issues.

One way to avoid this problem is to use works published under the Creative Commons license (CCl). By using CCl works, teens are able to freely produce AND publish their creative works, as long as they follow the attribution guidelines set forth by the license. The downside: finding quality resources published under CCls can be challenging.

Enter Steven Sanders (studiosputnik.com). Steven is a veteran comic book artist who has done work for Marvel and Image Comics. Recently, he has launched a successful Kickstarter (kickstarter.com) campaign and received funding for *Symbiosis*, an art book that will be published under a CCl. With this project, Steven is using his artistic talents to create a 1940s era bio-punk world in comic book style. How the world will be used is up to the reader – whether it be telling stories, making movies, or drawing more comics.

Steven was kind enough to answer a few of our questions about the project via email:

What brought you to the decision to begin a project under a creative commons license? What do you value most about publishing under a creative commons license?

To be honest, it started out as something of a lark. Just something that I thought would add a little more interest to the project and make it stand out from the crowd a bit. But, after actually thinking it through, I realized that it was perfect for a world-building art book like Symbiosis, as it encourages people to take the material and make it grow. I also think that it's sort of a way of acknowledging that due to digital technology, the IP [Intellectual Property] cat is out of the bag for good, and we might and well try and take advantage of that fact instead of fighting an arms race using DRM [Digital Rights Management] and lawsuits and whatnot.

What support and/or resistance have you encountered from within the comic book industry in choosing to undertake a creative commons project?

No resistance to speak of, there's been nothing but support for this project, and that's really refreshing and enjoyable.

Artists of any discipline can often feel a tension between individual artistic vision and the need for compromising that vision in collaborative art. Do you feel any apprehensions with the Symbiosis project, in that you will essentially become a co-creator with people you have never met?

Not really. I realized a long time ago that after something I make goes out to the public, it's no longer really "mine." I can't control how people interpret the art. Since Symbiosis is going to be just me working on it until it's printed, it's kind of the opposite of how I'm used to working. This is the first time in my memory that I've done something commercial that was made up entirely by me. Which is both exciting and somewhat terrifying, since I'll be the only one to blame if people do not like how Symbiosis turns out.

In a project like Symbiosis, how do you approach the process of building a world that is intended for collaborative use? What considerations do you have to take into account that differ from building a world for an individual project?

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At this point, I'm just looking to give people as much information about the world as possible, but doing it more via showing than through telling, so that people are allowed to come up with their own solutions regarding what things are in the illustrations. The book is going to be divided into two sections, one is a loosely sequential story of a woman traveling around in the world of Symbiosis, and the rest is an encyclopedia of sorts, detailing out the world as much as possible, from the fantastic, like giant floating cities, to houses and clothing. But, a disclaimer will be inserted before that section starts, where I'll state that everything that I write down about the various cultures, machines and other details of the world is just my take on it, and people should feel free to take the illustrations in whatever direction they see fit. In that sense, I consider myself to be just another contributor. There is no "canon" to Symbiosis.

And one final question for the people intending to explore your world: What advice do you have for people using Symbiosis to produce their own creative outputs?

Just have fun with it. If they are going to do anything commercial with it, I'd encourage them to not attempt to do anything just for the sake of the anticipated audience. This project may have just been a lucky outlier, but Symbiosis was probably the first time I ever went and did only and exactly what I love doing. I didn't have to try and find something

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interesting in the work, and that made my passion for the project very genuine and easy to produce. I think that people can sense honest vs manufactured enthusiasm, and I'd suggest that anyone playing in the Symbiosis sandbox take the same approach. All that said, though, I should note that I do enjoy working with other people, it's just that it requires the use of a slightly different set of mental muscles, if that makes any sense.

So, yeah, have fun and don't force things. Explore what you find to be enjoyable, and take advantage of the sense of play that comes from that method.