

## To adapt or not to adapt?

Since Bryan Singer's X-Men adaptation, the summer blockbuster has been revitalised by the graphic novel, the re-birth of DC stalwarts Batman and Superman

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Thursday 11 October 2007

Since Bryan Singer's X-Men adaptation, the summer blockbuster has been revitalised by the graphic novel. The re-birth of DC stalwarts Batman and Superman, plus myriad adaptations from the Marvel stable, have achieved consistent and lucrative success, which, in turn, has led to a re-examination of how a blockbuster is composed: look at Die Hard 4.0 for a seasoned veteran targeting a geekier demographic.

The benefit is definitely mutual. Graphic novels have enjoyed a boost in popularity and in quality, as a number of serialised comics – see Peter David's mutant-noir X-Factor – are given space to stretch their creative legs. In addition, previously under-appreciated works such as Alan Moore's V for Vendetta and Max Allan Collins's Road to Perdition, have been given due time in the spotlight. But where do you draw the line?

For every Spiderman there must be a Daredevil, Catwoman, Punisher, and so on. This simply reflects the paucity of quality superhero work, with the X-Men franchise retaining the bulk of the talent. The real problem is the act of adaptation itself. Look at Frank Miller's Sin City, and its prospective sequels. Where other screen adaptations allowed for artistic freedom, Sin City used the comic book as a storyboard, boasting it as a virtue. In doing so, the original material is reduced to a mere film companion. Gaps previously left to the reader's imagination by the writer are filled in definitively; Hartigan is Bruce Willis, Marv is Mickey Rourke. The books written since then have been influenced by the film as much as it was influenced by the first graphic novel.

There have long been rumours of a film version of Moore's seminal Watchmen, which seems now to have a cast, and a tentative release date. But there must be moderation. Some of the best work in the history of the graphic novel, like Neil Gaiman's Sandman or Art Spiegelman's Maus, will likely never appear on the big screen, and this is not a bad thing. The ultimate goal for a comic book cannot be induction into cinema; or why bother with the comic book? Sandman is not a movie, any more than Catcher in the Rye is a play. The graphic novel is a genre with virtually boundless potential, which must, eventually, shake off the encroaching influence of cinema to be respected in its own right.



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