

Caped Crusaders and Comic Books

A Primer on Modern American
Superhero Culture

Major Publishers

- Two major sources of Superhero Culture
- Marvel (owned by Disney)
- DC (owned by Time Warner)
- Many other smaller publishers

Marvel Comics



DC Comics (DC Entertainment)



Why are Superheroes “hot”?

- The recent onslaught of Hollywood movies





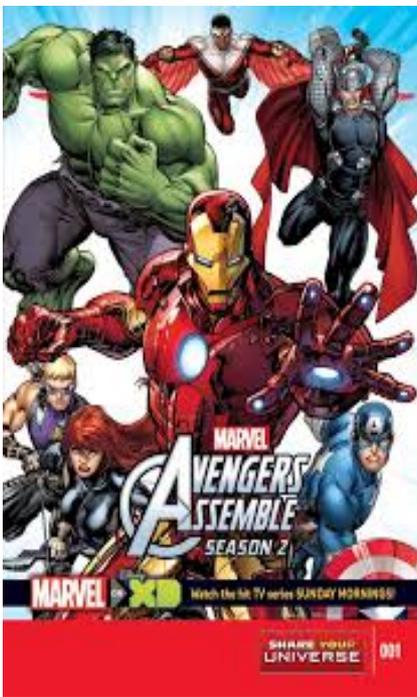
- Superhero Themed Videogames, Toys, and Costumes



- “So if kids want to read about Superheroes, where do I start?”
 - Elementary
 - Middle Grades
 - High School (and beyond)
- Ratings Systems to Ensure Appropriateness

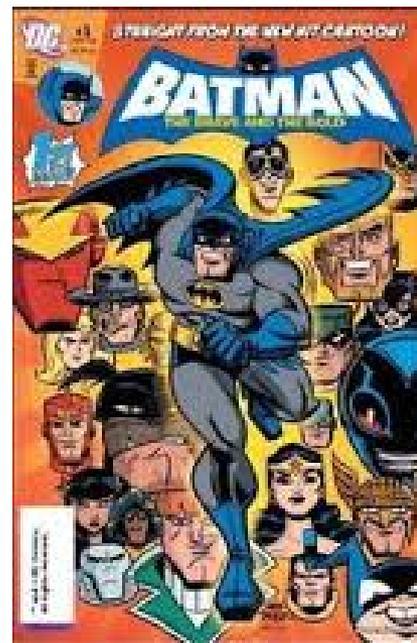
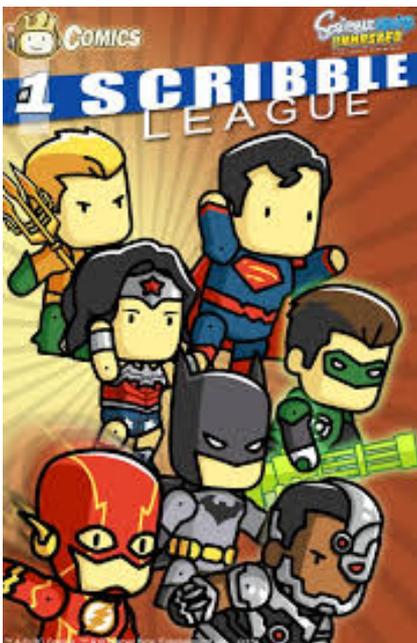
Marvel/DC Rating System

- ALL AGES/EVERYONE - Appropriate for all ages.
- T - Appropriate for most readers, but parents are advised that they might want to read before or with younger children.
- T+ - TEENS AND UP - Appropriate for teens 13 and above.
- PARENTAL ADVISORY/MATURE - Appropriate for older teens. Similar to T+, but featuring more mature themes and/or more graphic imagery. Recommended for teen and adult readers.
- EXPLICIT CONTENT – I don't think this needs an explanation

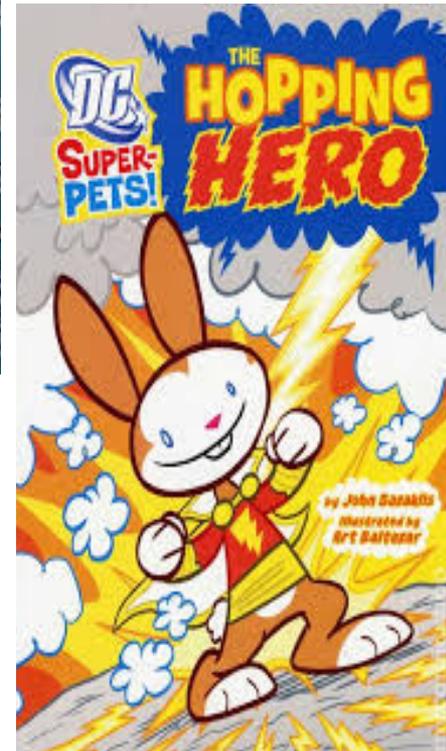
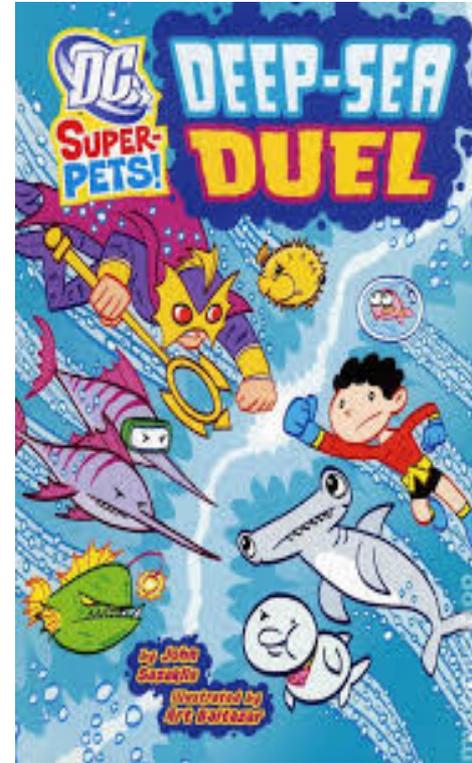
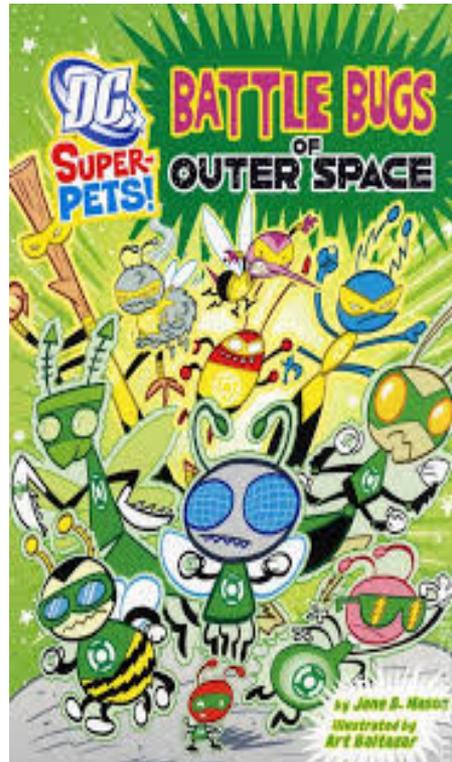
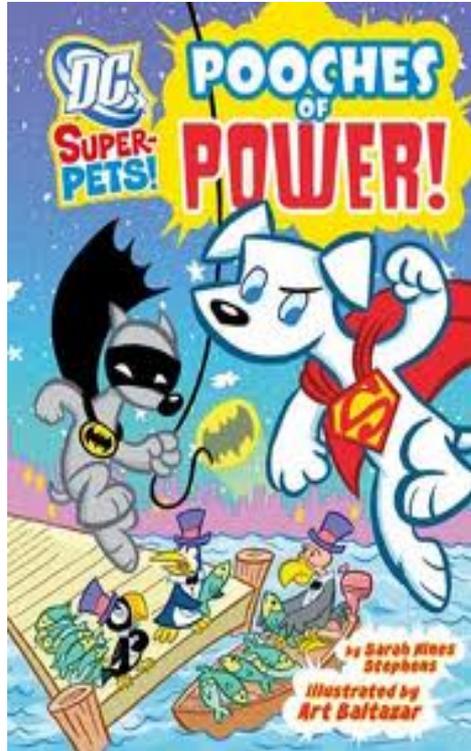


All Ages Comic Books

- Usually include most popular characters
- Typically include an “all ages” or “everyone” rating



The Super Pets!



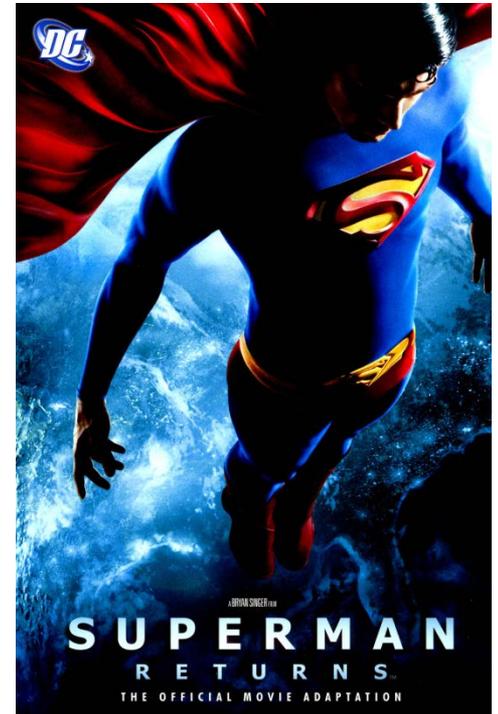
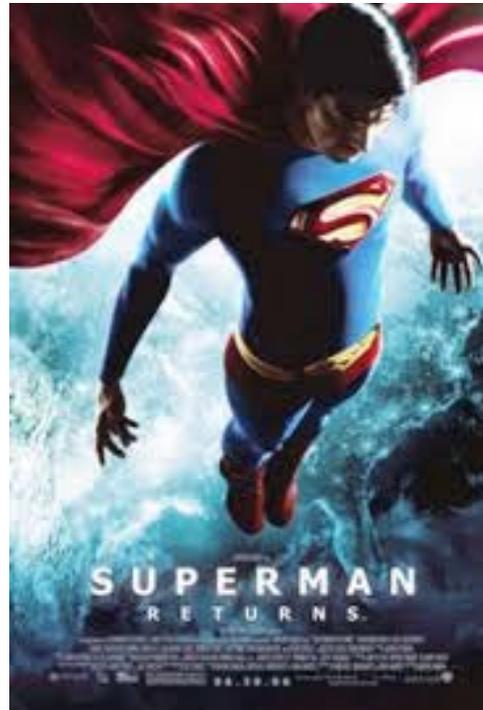
All of these are by an Illustrator named Art Baltazar. Pretty much anything by him should be ideal for elementary age readers.

Also, these are Chapter Books, not traditional Comic Books. Each one has three chapters.

Middle Grades

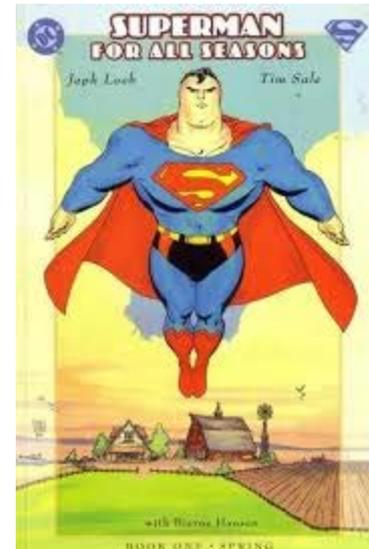
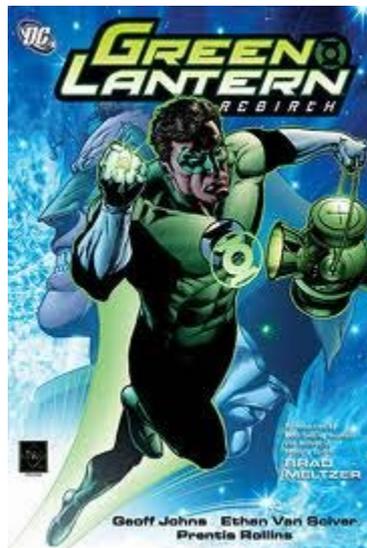
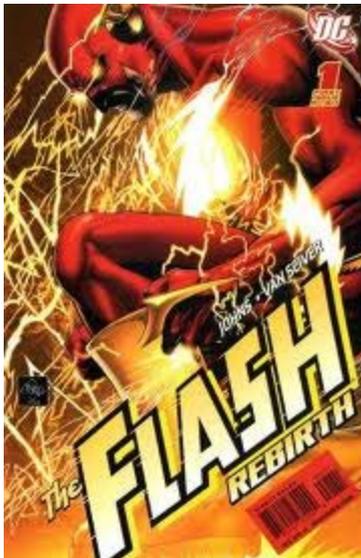
- Lots of mainstream titles to pick from
- Movie Adaptations very popular
- Any collected volumes of mainstream characters are probably a good choice
 - Spiderman
 - Thor
 - Captain America
 - Iron Man
 - X-Men
 - Avengers
 - Green Lantern
 - Flash
 - Wonder Woman
 - Superman
 - Justice League
 - Batman (always check first)

Movie Adaptations



Good Ones to Start With . . .

- Flash: Rebirth by Geoff Johns and Ethan Van Sciver
- Green Lantern: Rebirth by Geoff Johns and Ethan Van Sciver
- Superman for All Seasons by Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale

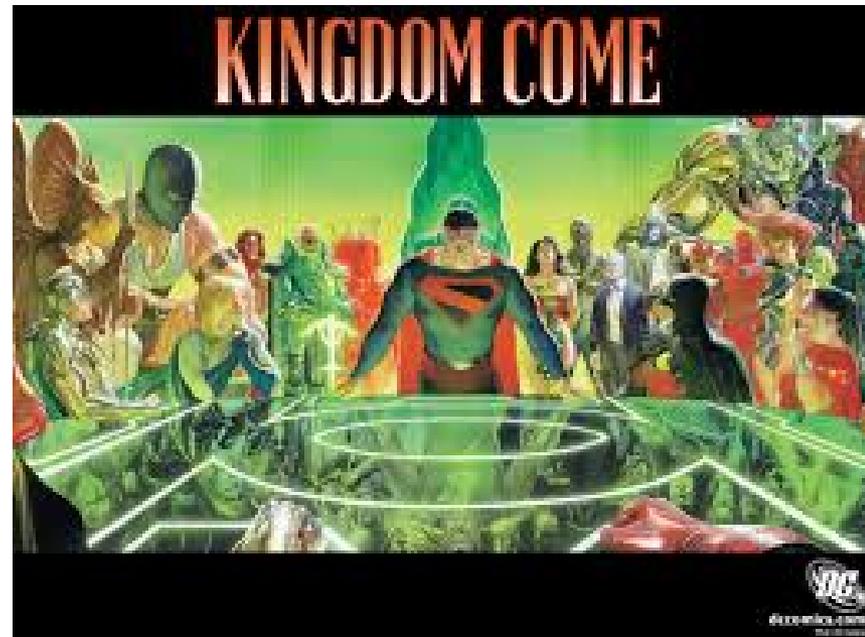


High School

- Titles that are High Interest, but are more likely to be rated T+ or Parental Advisory / Mature
- Often much more dense, more pictures and text per page
- Often contain much more complex storytelling
- Often less about fighting, more about complex interpersonal relationships
 - Love vs. Hate
 - Human Motivations

Kingdom Come

- Mark Waid and Alex Ross
- Future story – What happens when superheroes get old, and society seems to be moving on without them?
- Ultimate Superman vs. Batman Story – Their standards, their motivations, their methods.



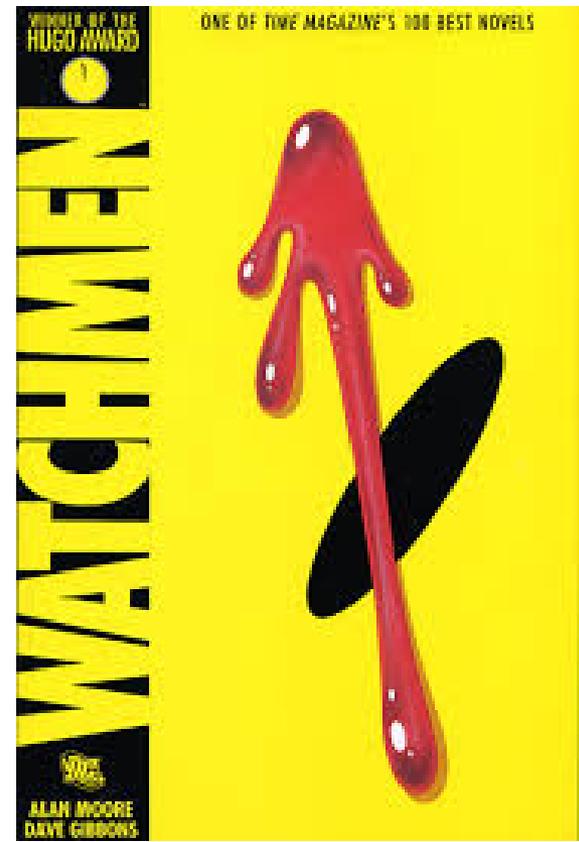


THE DELIBERATE TAKING
OF HUMAN--EVEN *SUPER-HUMAN*--
LIFE GOES AGAINST EVERY BELIEF
I *HAVE*--AND THAT *YOU* HAVE.

THAT'S THE *ONE THING*
WE'VE *ALWAYS* HAD IN *COMMON*.
IT'S WHAT *MADE* US WHAT WE
ARE.

Watchmen

- Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons
- The Granddaddy of all Apocalyptic Graphic Novels
- Often referred to as the “deconstruction” of the American Superhero
- Made Time Magazine’s Top 100 American Books of 20th Century
- Lots of mature themes
 - Violence
 - Sex
 - Language
 - Cold War Geo-Political Strategies



"1956 AGED 16. LEFT CHILDREN'S HOME BECAME UNSKILLED MANUAL WORKER, GARMENT INDUSTRY."



"JOB BEARABLE BUT UNPLEASANT. HAD TO HANDLE FEMALE CLOTHING."

"1962. SPECIAL ORDER FOR DRESS IN NEW DR. MANHATTAN SPIN-OFF FABRIC VISCOUS FLUIDS BETWEEN TWO LAYERS LATEX, HEAT AND PRESSURE SENSITIVE."



"CUSTOMER YOUNG GIRL, ITALIAN NAME. NEVER COLLECTED ORDER. SAID DRESS LOOKED UGLY."

"WRONG NOT UGLY AT ALL."
"BLACK AND WHITE MOVING. CHANGING SHAPE... BUT NOT MIXING. NO GRAY."



"VERY, VERY BEAUTIFUL."

"IT'S FEBRUARY, 1960, AND EVERYTHING IS FROZEN. I AM STARTING TO ACCEPT THAT I SHALL NEVER FEEL COLD OR WARM, AGAIN."



"PERFECT."



"WHEN WE SO PUBLIC NEXT MONTH EVERY MAGAZINE IN THE WORLD'S GONNA WANT THESE PICTURES!"

"HOW DO YOU LIKE YOUR COSTUME? PRETTY SLICK, HUH?"



"I DON'T LIKE IT... ESPECIALLY THIS HELMET. WHAT'S THIS SYMBOL STAND FOR?"

"UH, WELL, IT MEANS, LIKE, ATOMS, ATOMIC POWER, LIKE THAT..."

"NOBODY WANTED IT MEANT FOR ME TOOK IT HOME LEARNED TO CUT IT USING HEATED IMPLEMENTS TO RESEAL LATEX."



"WHEN I HAD CUT IT ENOUGH, IT DIDN'T LOOK LIKE A WOMAN ANYMORE."



"SOON, BECAME BORED. FABRIC HAD NO USE LEFT IT IN TRUNK. FORGOT ABOUT IT."

"TWO YEARS PASSED MARCH, 1964. STOPPED AT NEWSSTAND ON WAY TO WORK, BOUGHT PAPER. THERE SHE WAS. FRONT PAGE."

"WOMAN WHO'D ORDERED SPECIAL DRESS."



"KITTY GENOVESE"

"I'M SURE THAT WAS THE WOMAN'S NAME."

"IT'S MEANINGLESS A HYDROGEN ATOM WOULD BE MORE APPROPRIATE. I DON'T THINK I SHALL BE WEARING THIS."



"BUT THIS IS THE ONLY PLACE WHERE YOUR SYMBOL SHOWS! THE MARKETING BOYS SAY YOU NEED A SYMBOL..."



"THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT I NEED."

"YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT I NEED."

"IF I'M TO HAVE A SYMBOL, IT SHALL BE ONE I RESPECT."



"THERE"

"RAPED TORTURED KILLED HERE IN NEW YORK. CUT INTO HER OWN APARTMENT BUILDING."



"ALMOST FORTY NEIGHBORS HEARD SCREAMS NOBODY DID ANYTHING. NOBODY CALLED COPS. SOME OF THEM EVEN WATCHED. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?"



"SOME OF THEM EVEN WATCHED."

"I KNEW WHAT PEOPLE WERE, THEN, BEHIND ALL THE EVASIONS, ALL THE SELF-DECEPTION, ASHAMED FOR HUMANITY, I WENT HOME. I TOOK THE REMAINS OF HER UNWANTED DRESS..."



"... AND MADE A FACE THAT I COULD BEAR TO LOOK AT IN THE MIRROR"

"I... I LIKE IT! IT'S GOT SOMETHING, YOU KNOW? IT'S SIMPLE, BUT IT'S..."



"YEAH! YEAH, THAT'S GOOD PEOPLE WILL REMEMBER IT. WHEN THEY SEE IT THEY'LL THINK OF DR. MANHATTAN."

"DOCTOR WHAT?"



"THEY EXPLAIN THAT THE NAME HAS BEEN CHOSEN FOR THE ONGOING ASSOCIATIONS. IT WILL RAISE IN AMERICA'S ENEMIES. THEY'RE SHAPING ME INTO SOMETHING SAUDY AND LETHAL..."

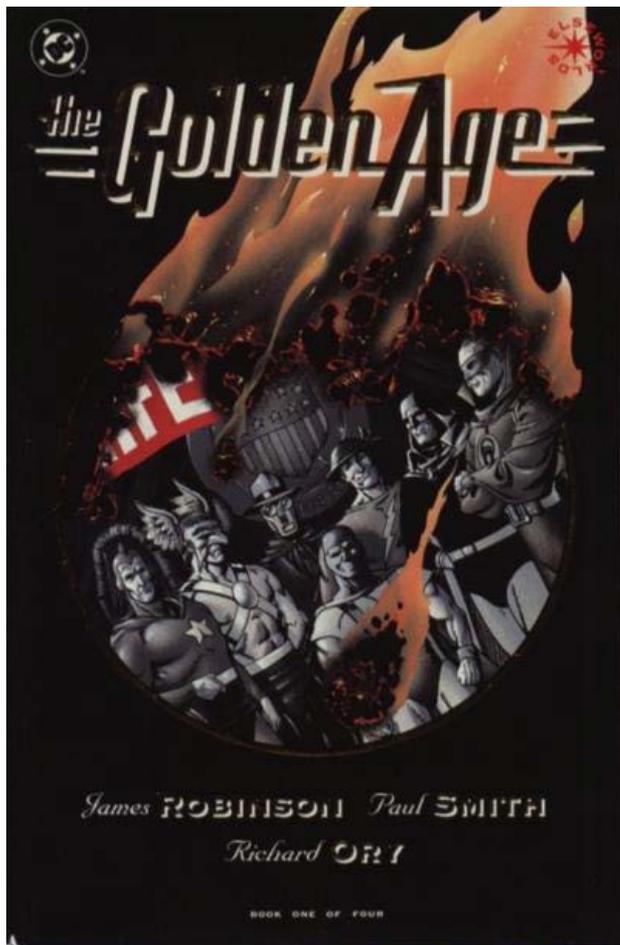
"Dark Times"
"ATOMIC BOMB DROPPED ON HIROSHIMA"



"IT'S ALL GETTING OUT OF MY HANDS..."

Personal Favorites . . .

- The Golden Age by James Robinson and Richard Ory
- Set immediately after WWII, what do superheroes do when there's no more war?
- Addresses many early Cold War issues
 - Paranoia
 - McCarthyism
 - Feminism
 - Drug Abuse / Alcoholism
 - Unquestioned Patriotism
 - Fear of Nuclear Weapons



I just think--
he's mad.

Terry Sloane--His
airline's up and running.

He was good at EVERY-
THING. That's what made
him MR. TERRIFIC.
But "everything" is a
lot to keep in line. It
DILUTED his intensity.

And God knows a
costumed hero
NEEDS intensity.

The airline, he bought for
a song. Too cheap, some
say. Rumor has it he
used force to get the
price so low.

So much for "Fair Play",
huh, Terry?

Personal Favorites

- New Frontier by Darwyn Cooke
- The bridge between the Golden Age (WWII) heroes and the Silver Age (modern heroes)
- In many ways picks up where The Golden Age left off in the early 1950's and carries into the early 1960's
- Explores themes of 1960's
 - Fear of alien invasion
 - Fear of nuclear proliferation
 - Racial tension
 - Feminism
 - Vietnam



BLACK OR WHITE, JOHN WILSON WAS AN AMERICAN.

HE FOUGHT FOR HIS COUNTRY, HE WORKED HARD AND NEVER SPENT AS MUCH AS A MINUTE IN JAIL. HE WENT TO CHURCH EVERY SUNDAY.



IN RETURN, HIS FAMILY WAS MURDERED, AND HIS LIFE WAS STRIPPED AWAY FROM HIM.

WHEN HE ROSE UP AND FOUGHT THESE ENEMIES OF FREEDOM, HE WAS HUNTED, CAPTURED, AND BURNED TO DEATH.



HOLY MOLEY, THAT IS PURE RUGGED. CAN YOU IMAGINE BEING BURNED TO DEATH?

TONIGHT, MY FINAL THOUGHT IS THIS.

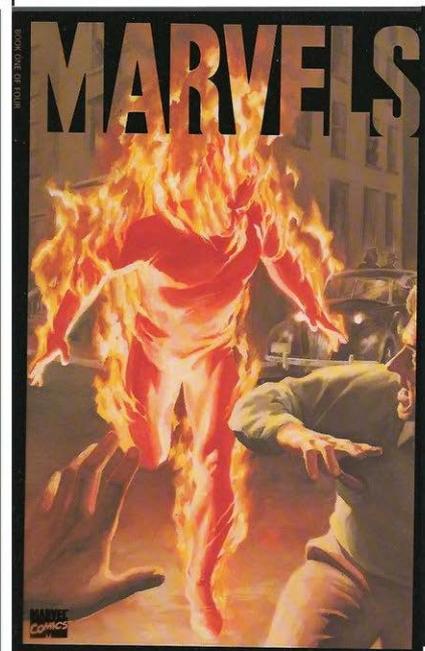
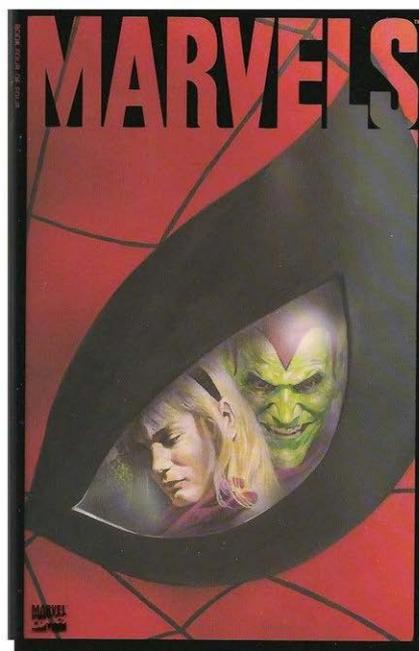
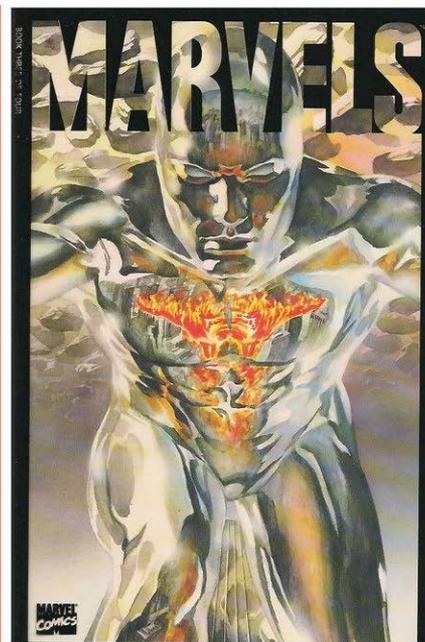
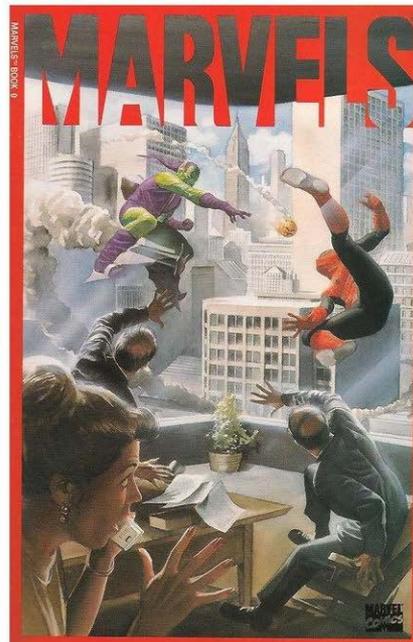
HOW CAN AMERICA HOPE TO PRESERVE FREEDOM AROUND THE WORLD WHEN SHE CAN'T EVEN GUARANTEE IT TO MILLIONS OF HER OWN CHILDREN?



DC: *The New Frontier* **THE ABSOLUTE EDITION**

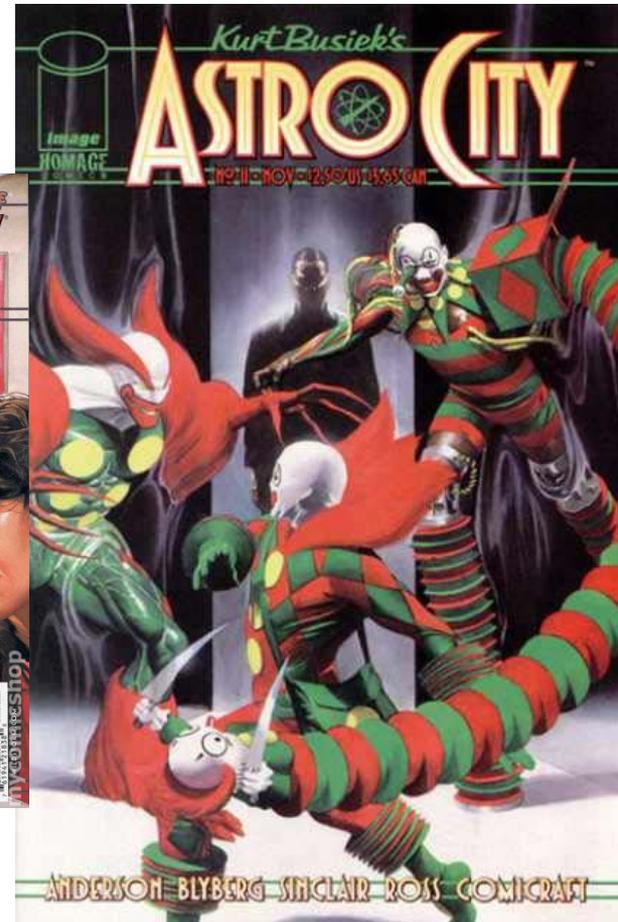
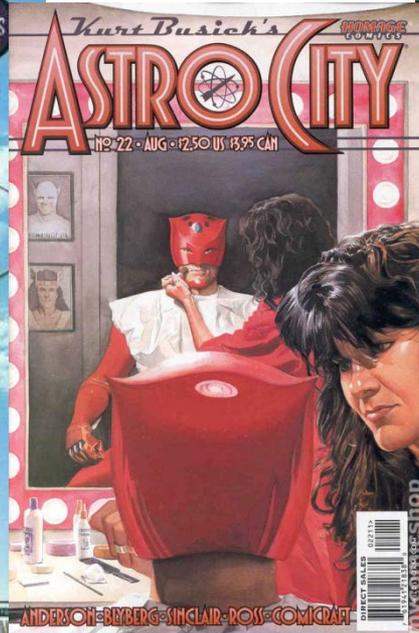
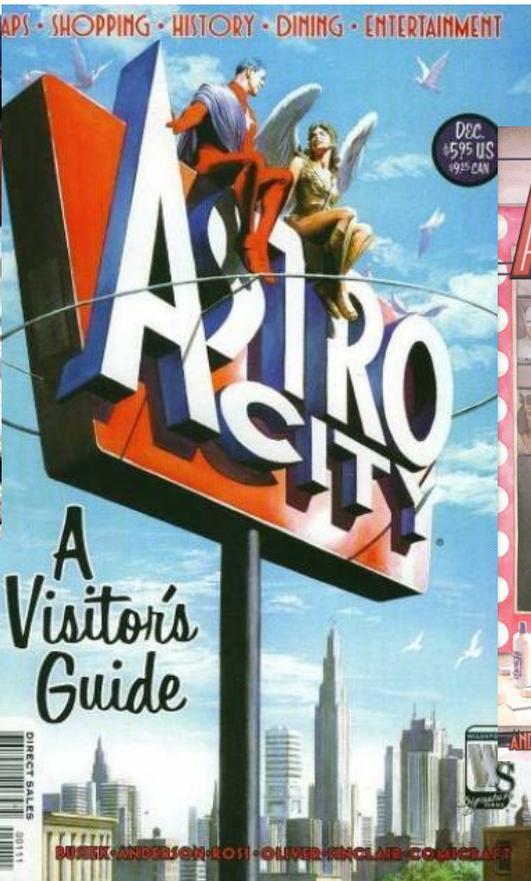
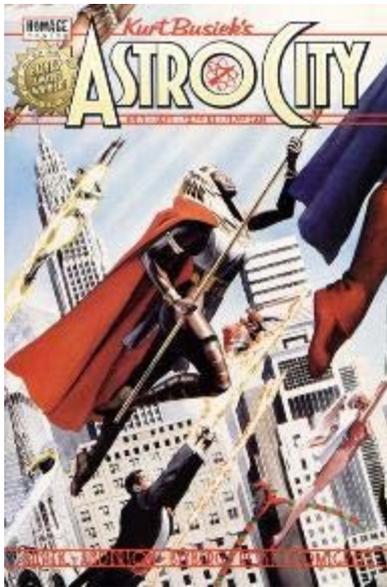
Personal Favorites. . . .

- Marvels by Kurt Busiek and Alex Ross
- Traces the history of the United States from 1939-1980 through Marvel Superheroes
- Addresses many issues from modern American History
- Told from perspective of man-on-the-street instead of heroes
- Sets the stage for Creator owned series, Astro City



Astro City

- A completely different look at heroes, from the perspective of bystanders



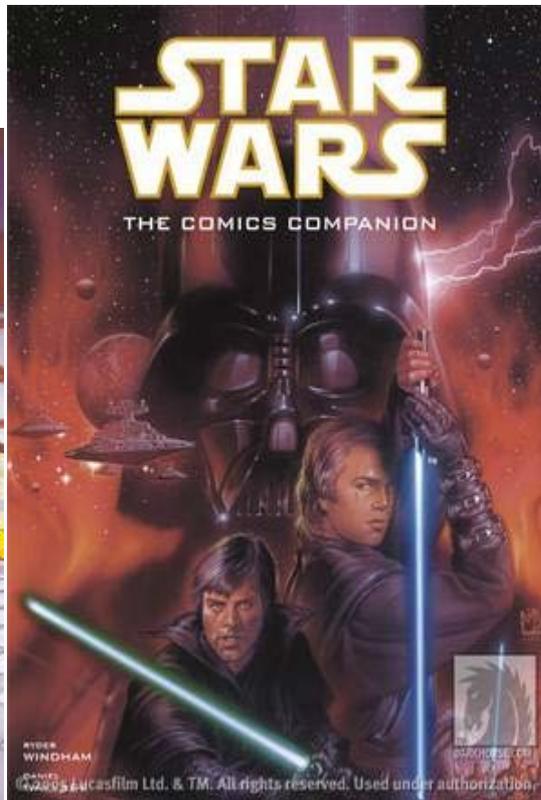
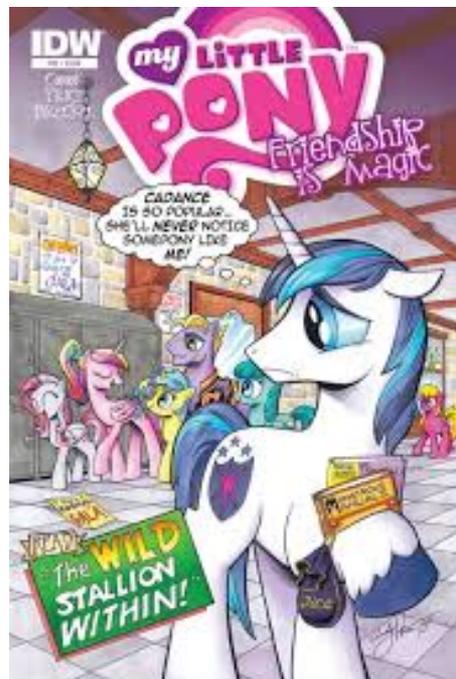
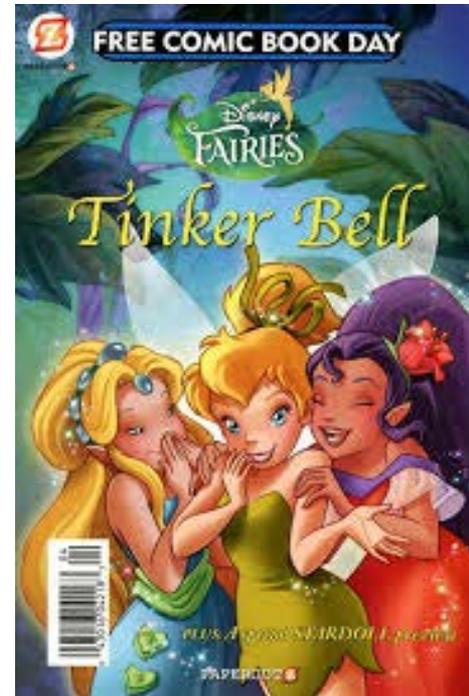
Non-Superhero Comics

- Many other companies besides Marvel and DC
- Many other subjects besides Superheroes
- Many (most) of them licensed properties



Licensed Properties

- If your audience isn't interested in Superheroes



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