

Moore and Dave Gibbons. Of it, Rob Mitchell writes:

Many people associate comic books with childhood, and hence dismiss them out-of-hand as "serious literature." Granted, the overwhelming majority of comic today are still targetted at 12-to-16-year-old males, but there are many exceptions. Perhaps the most

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lauded example in the last year is the WATCHMAN series, written by Alan Moore with art by Dave Gibbons. Originally published in twelve monthly installments, the series has been collected in a trade paperback that some people will nominate for a Hugo.

The WATCHMAN universe is much like ours, except bleaker. In the 40's, 50's, and early 60's, a handful of people dressed up in exotic costumes and fought crime (busting mobs and drug rings, etc.). With one striking exception, these "superheroes" (or "masks" as they are called) were all normal human beings -- no mutant powers, no aliens from other planets, etc. The public became increasingly concerned about their vigilante justice, and eventually the job of "mask" was outlawed.

That background is gradually revealed in the course of the story. The main plotline starts out as a murder mystery -- someone has killed the Comedian, a sardonic mercenary with close ties to the American military/intelligence communities. Rorschach, a mask who has refused to retire, decides to investigate the killing. From that starting point, WATCHMAN touches on the proper use of power, free will vs. determinism, what *would* the world be like with costumed crimefighters, etc. I'm amazed by the depth of characterization in the series, and the plot is multi-tiered without being convoluted. Also, every single comics convention you can think of -- thought balloons, sound effects, transitional narration -- is absent from WATCHMAN.

There is enough text in the series to qualify WATCHMAN for a Hugo. [See comment below. -ecl] I'll be nominating it. Heck, I'd nominate WATCHMAN for a Pulitzer -- I think it's that good. One word of caution, though -- don't read it all at one sitting. It's best when read one chapter at a time, then put aside to be mulled over for a few days. I'm not a good enough writer to express the

eager anticipation with which I awaited each installment, and the intense filling of satisfaction with which I was rewarded every month. WATCHMAN is a tour-de-force; a masterful blend of art and story -- an outstanding example of literature that combines picture and word to provide a pleasure unattainable in a pure-prose novel.

Other graphic novels that are recommended include the DARK KNIGHT series by Frank Miller (a Hugo-nominated look at Batman coming out of retirement 20 years from now), RONAN by Frank Miller (a merging of cyberpunk society and ninja ethics), and DESTROY! by Scott McCloud (a wonderful send-up of those epic superhero battles in which Manhattan may get leveled but "miraculously, no one was hurt.").

2. Yes, THE WATCHMEN has enough text to be nominated as a novel on that basis. Regardless, the Nolacon Committee has seen fit to create a new category which covers graphic novels, unproduced screenplays, and anything else that they think doesn't fit

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elsewhere. What will happen with THE WATCHMEN, given its meshing with two categories, is not clear.

And I agree about not reading it in one sitting. I read it in three sittings (I think) and missed a lot because of that. [-ecl]

3. AT&T is giving me a perq that I hadn't really thought much about until I saw a news story today. The news story was basically about the goings-on at Gallaudet College. The story went on to tell about what the deaf were doing in the workplace and the prime example was a deaf supervisor of fifteen hearing people who managed a telephone service for the deaf and hearing-impaired at (where else?) AT&T. This was what CNN decided was part of the news; it wasn't just a public relations ad. It feels good to see people who have positive things to say about AT&T. When I was in Britain a few months back, BBC News ran a very angry news story about why the British phone service was so bad. Why was it that AT&T, who had to contend with the break-up, always provided much better service to their customers than the British service? Whether anyone thinks of it, that is a perq also. It is a heck of a lot better than hearing phrases like "Reach out and crush someone" on the news.

Back in the 1950s there was on Broadway a play called "Inherit the Wind" by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. It retold the true story of the Scopes "Monkey Trial" in which a law against teaching evolution in the classroom was challenged. I n h e r i t t h e W i n d is a good play that says a lot of things that should be said about religious intolerance and freedom of thought. In 1960 it was made into a film with Spencer Tracy and Frederic March that still gets seen, but not often enough. Unfortunately, with a growing religious fundamentalist movement in this country, some members of which are not actually advocates of free thought, the play is more timely today than when it was written. AT&T is sponsoring a new production for commercial television. It will star Kirk Douglas and will be shown Sunday, March 20, 9 PM (EST) on NBC. Its message may actually risk some business for AT&T, and the showing may not be popular in some circles. But being reminded of the issues of the Scopes trial is one thing this country needs right about now. That's m y company that is sponsoring it.

4. Charlie Harris and I are looking for good novels on the following themes. If anyone has any suggestions, please contact me at mtuxo!jrrt, or Charlie at mtuxo!xchar.

1) Alien religions. We've all read religious-oriented SF or fantasy (e.g. Blish's A CASE OF CONSCIENCE), but I don't recall any books that deal with the religions of alien creatures.

2) SF Non-murder mysteries. Again, the SF-mystery has often been done (Asimov's Robot novels, Niven's Gil Hamilton stories, etc.), but rarely have good mysteries been written around science fiction

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themes without resorting to the stock "solve the murder" plot device. Note, we're not looking for suspense or espionage, although the existence of those elements won't cause a book to be rejected. We're just seeking a good intellectual challenge.

[Submitted by Rob Mitchell.]

Mark Leeper

MT 3E-433 957-5619
...mtgzz!leper