

Drawn to the form

A COLUMN IN THE TEACHING LIBRARIAN, volume 17, no. 1

Libraries Come Together Over Comics

By **Douglas Davey**

If the average citizen has a mental picture of what a comics creator looks like, it's probably one of three archetypes. There's the quiet, workman-like graphic artist of the mid-century. He (it's always he) sits at a drafting desk, ink brush in hand, while a cigarette and fedora rest nearby. Or, perhaps, this average citizen imagines the underground indie artist, huddled in a basement working away feverishly at some tortured bit of self-revelation which is destined for the back corner of the local comics shop. More likely, the image is that of the delayed-adolescent fanboy, unleashing his fantasies of lust and power on a distant audience.

What each of these archetypes have in common is the image of a single creator, toiling alone at his or her work. While much of the work of comic creation remains a solitary endeavour, what libraries do to get the creations into the hands of readers is more collaborative than ever before. Through promotion, reviews, articles, presentations, and even word of mouth, librarians are working together to get the best comic literature into the hands of our patrons.

Let's start with book reviews. Book reviews are like relatives: you have to have them, they can even be fun sometimes, but the sheer volume of them can also drive you

near to, or even over, the proverbial brink. And, of course, reviews can provoke frustration, confusion, or even anger. (As a book reviewer of some years' standing, I know whereof I speak.) Don't get me wrong, I love reviews, I really do. And when it comes to writing them, I enjoy promoting excellent books while also saving libraries' precious purchasing dollars by warning against inferior fare. What I didn't know when I began writing reviews was that I would soon find myself part of a community. A book review brings together a creator, a journal editor, a reviewer, and a reader—all in a matrix of 250 words or less. And it doesn't stop there. A review might then be referred to, questioned, or used in any of a thousand ways as the collaborative process continues.

A great example of comics-related collaboration amongst librarians is the Graphic Novels in Libraries (GNLIB) listserv, where participants can discuss ideas, share thoughts, make recommendations, request opinions, or just read what others have to say. There is now a substantial archive of posts that can be mined for all sorts of information: booklists, recommended titles, organizational questions, etc.

Recently I sat on a panel (on Mother's Day—shame on you, organizers!) at the Toronto Comics Arts Festival enti-

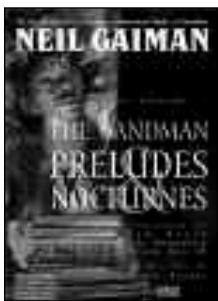
tled "Can Libraries Save Graphic Novels?" Also on the panel were other librarians who felt strongly about the value of graphic novels in libraries. Now, if someone had told me when I was a kid that the comics I loved so much would become a topic of such high-level discourse or would be so embraced by libraries, I would have told you that you had eaten too many Pop Rocks™. But, there we were, librarians and bibliophiles of every stripe, sharing ideas about how to make our libraries better. And, at the risk of sounding corny, isn't that what library collaboration is all about?

Now, considering how well comics and librarians can go together, here are some comics that feature librarians:



*Birds of Prey, Vol. 1:
Of Like Minds*
by Gail Simone

It's a sign of the times: long-time librarian and superhero Batgirl is now Oracle, a computer-tech information specialist. Having lost the use of her legs, she uses her keen intellect and technowizardry to battle Gotham's never-ending supply of baddies. Along the way she recruits some other super-powered ladies and together they form the Birds of Prey. (teen/adult)



*The Sandman, Vol. 1:
Preludes and Nocturnes*
by Neil Gaiman

OK, Lucien may be a skinny, bookish, stereotype of a librarian, but that makes sense in the archetypal dream world of Sandman, where the bespectacled librarian watches over all of the books that have ever been dreamed, or ever will be. (adult)



*The Long Way Home
(Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Season 8,
Vol. 1)*
by Joss Whedon

Just because the TV show is over doesn't mean you have to give up on the idea of ever seeing Giles again. Buffy creator Joss Whedon picks up where the show left off, continuing the story in this volume, which features yet another British, bookish (and lovable) stereotype of a librarian. (teen/adult)



*Rex Libris, Vol. 1:
I, Librarian*
by James Turner

No account of librarians in comics would be complete without a tip of the hat to Rex Libris, Head Librarian at Middleton Public Library. If you took the Men In Black concept, threw in some righteous anger, and set it in a library, you would get Rex Libris. (adult)

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