

## Comics Across Media

### Hope Nicholson

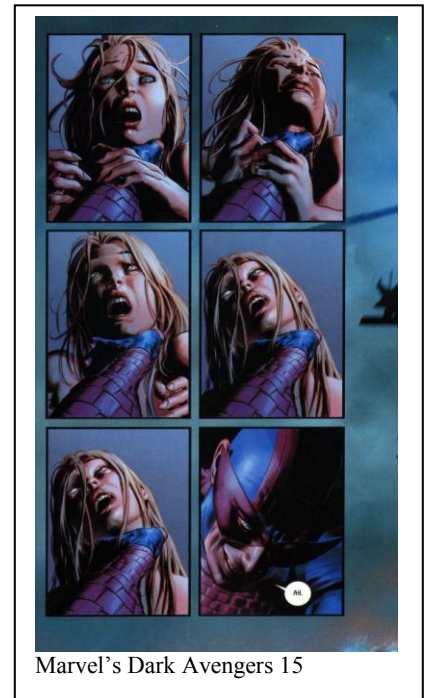
As screenplays are being mined from the comic book world and comic aesthetics are in demand for event films such as *Scott Pilgrim & Iron Man 2*, a great deal of attention has been paid to the effects that comic books are having on television and film. Less discussed are the direct changes to comic books.

Comic books, because of their serial nature, have more often resembled television shows than films. But in recent years comic books have come to dramatically resemble the visual style and form of film, particularly blockbusters. This leads to less dialogue, and an emphasis on analyzing visual cues, creating a more involved reader. A 'realist' style of art has come into popularity where the characters look closer to photos than the original cartoon style, allowing the reader to easily envision what a live-action version would look like. It has become common to have pages with little action between the panels; like film, these techniques add emotional depth to pivotal scenes.

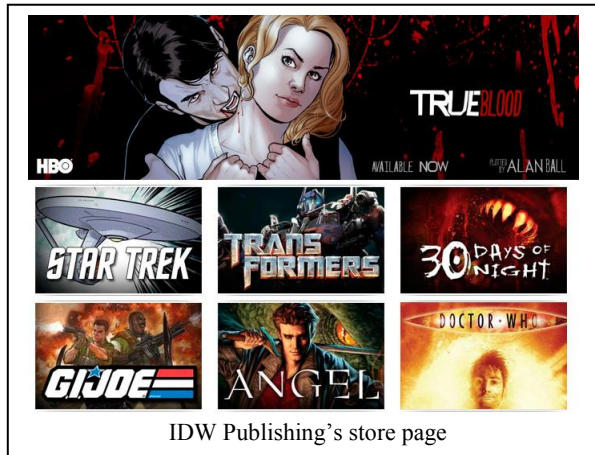
One reason for the change in style is that the comic book adaptation market is currently booming, the 'Big 2' comic book companies, Marvel and DC, affiliate themselves with certain studios (Disney and Warner Brothers respectably) and the comics they produce can be seen as visual pilots rather than a separate medium. *Kick-Ass* is one of the latest comic projects to have this done. Three months after the first issue was released, there was a screenplay written, less than two years later, while the comic was still running, the film version was released. If a comic becomes popular enough, it is a very good sign that it will work well as a film adaptation, and producers are able at little cost, to test out the audiences' reactions to characters and plot before film development even starts.

Screenwriters, disillusioned with the cost of making spectacle films, are becoming enchanted with the idea of a budgetless medium that can produce anything from their wildest imaginations. Comic book companies are actively courting these writers, bringing a vastly more cinematic feel to their comics than ever before, with the hopeful result of these writers audiences coming into the comic market. Joss Whedon is one of these, writing a story arc for Marvel's teen hit *Runaways* and perennial fan favorite *Astonishing X-men*, favoring titles that appeal to fans of his fantasy television series. He then created his own comics continuing the story of the *Buffy/Angel* universe, which brought in both the fans of the original series and new comic fans from his Marvel arcs. Scott Thompson, Ilias Kyriazis, and Kevin Smith are other screenwriters who have begun to write in the comic medium.

Celebrities are also being brought on as 'story consultants' in order to try and convert their fan base to comic customers. This is seen more often with smaller, independent companies who need the attention to compete with the Big 2. In the last year, Rosario Dawson has been affiliated with the Image series *Occult Crimes Taskforce* and IDW comics has released the *Pantheon* series created with Michael Chiklis. Amber Benson, Felicia Day, Amanda Palmer, Olivia Newton John are among other celebrities



that have lent their names to recent comic books. The collaboration with a popular name serves to bring in some fan base to an otherwise mediocre comic, but as of yet none of these comics seem to be able to compete with similar offerings from larger publishers.



Film and television producers are exploiting comic books ability to be powerful marketing tools, essentially advertisements that audiences pay for directly. The television series Spartacus advertised itself for a month before its premiere on the back of Marvel comics, and a supplementary comic by IDW was released during the show's run. The marketing geniuses of the film Twilight combined the tween friendly story with the indulgent format of manga to create a powerful cross-promotion geared towards young females. In Marvel and DC comics, when a new comic-to-film is upcoming such as Thor or Batman, suddenly the character appears in a storm of new titles, controversial story arcs, and guest appearances, using any opportunity possible to increase their presence.

While other media have had their hand in shaping the comics medium, and new media will continue to influence it in the future, right now comics are thriving economically in a way not seen since The Golden Age. Supported financially by film companies, comics adapt themselves to their new situation easily, mimicking and recreating aspects of film to the best of their ability. As long as film adaptations prove popular and attention doesn't wane from comics' filmic potential, the comic book industry's future looks far brighter than it has in decades.