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The astonishing
growth of
Graphic Novels

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C O M I C S

for grown-ups

One of the fastest growing areas of publishing in the past few years has been the Graphic Novel genre which cannot merely be dismissed as comics for grown-ups.

Although pioneered in the mid-Eighties by what was then a small packager of cult comic strip books, a company called Titan Books, and later developed by the mainstream comic publishing companies like Fleetway and Marvel, Graphic Novels are now entering the lists of traditional publishing houses such as Penguin, Gollancz, Hodder and Stoughton, Corgi and Macdonald.

And no longer do you have to seek out these books in the specialist comic book shops – again introduced by Titan – as the High Street bookshop chains begin to devote shelfspace to the Graphic Novel output.

Respectability for the genre was won as long ago as 1986 when Titan Books' *The Dark Knight Returns* entered the *Sunday Times* books bestseller list. Now in its sixth printing, Frank Miller's ultimate Batman story continues to sell, and Titan now have over 300

Graphic Novels in print including around 45 being published in 1990.

"What we've been trying to do is break down the idea that comics are just for kids or young male adults," says Titan's Publisher/Managing Director, Nick Landau. "Comic books deserve a far wider readership than that."

Apart from *Dark Knight* (£8.95), Titan's bestsellers include *Watchmen* (£9.95) and Clive Barker's *Tapping the Vein Vol 1* (£4.50) and *Vol 2* (£4.50). Among their spring releases were *The Spiral Cage* (£5.95), the true-life autobiography of Spina Bifida sufferer Al Davison which tied in with a Channel 4 documentary, and a new Batman – *Digital Justice* (£14.95). Their top spring title is *V for Vendetta* (£9.95) written by Alan Moore and David Lloyd.

Marvel's UK Managing Director is very excited at the prospect of a bright future for Graphic Novels and says, "I am delighted that there is an increasing recognition of the quality and value of comic art and that this is now being recognised by booksellers and the public."

Marvel's recently published titles include *X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills* (£5.50) in which superheroes the X-Men clash with Magneto and a TV evangelist; Walt Simonson's classic sci-fi Graphic Novel, *Star Slammers*, featuring the "toughest hi-tech mercenaries ever to ply the spaceways" (£5.50); *The Black Widow* (£5.50) in which the Black Widow discovers that her husband, The Red Guardian, may still be alive – by Gerry Conway with stunning artwork by George Freeman.

Although much of Marvel's output comes from the US, they are launching their own UK-originated material, the first of which is *Death's Head*, a 64-page, fully-painted book written by Simon Furman and drawn by Geoff Senior, with cover art by Walt Simonson. The character, a robot bounty hunter, apparently proved popular in his own comic book series last year and also makes 'guest appearances' in other Marvel titles. It is said to contain a 'spark of British eccentricity that appeals to

Graphic Novel readers.'

Fleetway's latest includes *Slaine: the Horned God Volume 1* (£4.50) 'a sword and sorcery epic' by Pat Mills and Simon Bisley, the first in a three-volume series; and *Troubled Souls* (£6.50) by Garth Ennis and John McRea – the first comic story to examine and comment about the Northern Ireland conflict, showing that Graphic Novels are not necessary all comic fantasy.

Fleetway are also publishing *Judge Dredd* and *Dick Tracy* Graphic Novels, and *True Faith*, said to be a controversial look at religious beliefs. In the autumn they publish *Batman vs Judge Dredd* which is expected to be a bestseller.

Warhammer – 'a macabre fantasy in a grim world of perilous adventure' – is a made-in-Britain series published by Games Workshop. It boasts 'panoramic history, epic wars and legendary exploits, goblins, orcs, elves, dwarves, heroes and wizards, political intrigue, high adventure and dark magic'.

The Seven Ages of Women (£5.95) as seen by seven leading women strip illustrators are encompassed in a 64-page anthology from Knockabout Comics. The seven ages are deemed to be Second Class Girl, Schoolgirl, Working Girl, Lover, Motherhood, Divorcee and Old Age. Knockabout also publish *Trombone*, a new quaterly humour comic featuring strips and cartoons from Europe.

Penguin Books have enthusiastically embraced the Graphic Novel genre with work from Britain, the US and Japan. New titles include Charles Burns' *Hard-Boiled Defective Stories* (£7.95), surreal tales from a cult author/artist whose strips have appeared in *The Face* and *The Village Voice*.

August sees publication of *Raw II* (£8.99), the second volume of Penguin's showcase of international avant garde work edited by Art Spiegelman and Francoise Mouly. It includes a new chapter of *Maus* by Spiegelman, the strip which 'broke new ground' when Penguin published it in book form in 1986.

