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**They're art! They're colorful! They're hot!
They're action-packed! They're stylish, sexy!
What are they, you ask? Comics, comics!**

By Scott Wesely
Staff Reporter

How long has it been since you picked up a comic book? Two years? Three or more? If you haven't been involved with comics this decade, you've been missing a lot. Comics have begun a renaissance in the last few years, with the establishment of a viable alternative market and the expansion and revision of the newsstand market. Comic books are acquiring a new maturity, sneaking up on the faithful reader who may have been becoming disillusioned with the direction of comics in many corners.

Comic books have more to offer today than ever before. If you are looking for a loud romp through good vs. evil, you can still find it. If you are looking for an intense emotional experience, you can now find that. If you are looking to be inspired by thoughtful ideas you previously could only find in a book or good movie, now you can find them in comics. If you want to examine styles of writers and artists, there are vast opportunities for that. You can even find clever and hilarious parodies of the real world and comics themselves. DC and Marvel, the companies which

have dominated the industry since the early '60s, are going through changes. DC's "Crisis on Infinite Earths" series changed their continuity drastically, leaving room for the revision of their legendary characters like Superman, The Batman and Wonder Woman by writers and artists who have been itching to get their hands on them.

The Batman's future is currently being explored by Frank Miller and Klaus Janson in their "Dark Knight" mini series. Twenty years in the future The Batman comes out of retirement. "Dark Knight" is one of the most intense comic book experiences you can imagine. Later Miller and Dave Mazzuchelli plan to explore The Batman's past, recounting his origins and first year of crimefighting. Doug Moench, who has written both "Batman" and "Detective Comics" for several years, is turning over his post to writers such as Barbara Randall and Harlan Ellison, the famous science fiction writer. They've split the continuity of the two books, leaving room for different plotlines. Moench now has several deluxe (higher priced, improved printing) books of his own at DC.

Alan Moore is also busy for DC. In addition to writing "Miracleman" (Eclipse), "The Boeffries Saga" (in "Flesh & Bones" by Upshot Graphics), and "Swamp Thing" (DC), he is doing a twelve-issue series called "Watchmen" about how superheroes might work in a more real world. "Watchmen" can be gritty and depressing at times, but it is a monument of characterization, a masterful use of the medium that will stand as a pinnacle of comicdom for years.

Legends, illustrated by John Byrne and written by John Ostrander and Len Wein, looks like it will prove to be the consummation of DC's 50th anniversary,

launching several new titles and revising many old concepts, including the original Captain Marvel and the Justice League.

John Byrne has made national news by totally restructuring Superman in "The Man of Steel," a six-issue limited series. He is making Supes more like his original concept, taking a near-invincible *ubermensch* and altering him to fit more human constraints. And he's doing it well.

Marvel, currently the leading comics publisher in the country, is also undergoing changes. In the last year they have discontinued around seven titles due to poor sales, they said. Now comes the NEW UNIVERSE, this is a group of eight titles inhabiting a separate universe from the normal Marvel continuity. Written and drawn by some of Marvel's most popular writers and artists, the New Universe is a new direction for Marvel. No longer will they rely only on their old characters for good sales. Now they will have characters created by today's creators for today's market. Whether it will succeed or not is yet to be seen.

Marvel is not abandoning its old characters, on the contrary, they are continuing to build on them. Crossover limited series are planned between the X-Men, the heroes of Marvel's best selling comic, and both the Avengers and the Fantastic Four, capitalizing on the enormous demand for more X-Men related books. "Classic X-Men" reprints of "X-Men" issues with new art and stories interspersed. Other planned X-projects include a Phoenix six-issue limited series and a Spider-Man/Wolverine crossover one-shot. The Silver Surfer, a character who achieved cult-hero status in the '60s is also getting a new series.

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