

Valiant comics revives stale industry with originality

Publisher does not shy from showing grisly, deathly scenes



Courtesy of Voyager Communications

Valiant started publishing comic books two years ago with the revival of "Magnus-Robot Fighter." Although that book, which was followed by another Gold-Key character "Solar-Man of the Atom," did not set the comic book world on its ear, it did lay the groundwork for things to come. About a year after Valiant had begun publishing, they had their first major crossover: "Unity." The story dealt with a woman named Erica Pierce who was trying to reshape the world the way she thought it should be shaped. "Unity" proved to be a huge hit and thrust Valiant into the limelight. Today they are considered the hottest company going — a fresh breath in the long stagnant world of stale comic books.

Valiant's best and most original comic by far is "Archer and Armstrong." It is written and drawn by Barry Windsor-Smith. Smith is, quite simply, the best artist currently working in mainstream comics. Amazingly enough, artists who cannot even come close to touching Smith's mastery of the medium are revered while Smith is seemingly overlooked. It is hoped that "Archer and Armstrong" will thrust

Smith back to the forefront and give him the popularity he enjoyed back in the '70s when he was working on "Conan."

"Archer and Armstrong" is the story of Archer, a young man who was killed by his parents but returned from the dead to avenge himself. He escaped to the East, where he lived in a temple and learned to be a master of hand-to-hand combat. But when he returned to the United States, he discovered his parents had been in jail for some time, and he lost his chance for revenge. Then he meets up with Armstrong.

Armstrong is a 10,000-year-old drunken bum who is being pursued by a religious sect. The sect thinks Armstrong is Satan and their goal in life is to kill him. (Although it seems nearly impossible to kill him, since he has been shot and stabbed, yet always keeps going.) They kidnap both Archer and Armstrong and take them to Italy, where they plan to kill Satan and his sidekick. In reality, they are below the Vatican and when Archer and Armstrong escape, they stumble into the Pope's sleeping chamber. The series, so far, has

been detailing their attempts to get back to the United States.

"Archer and Armstrong" is one of the best comic books put out. Besides being funny and witty, the characters are very realistic. These aren't heroes looking for villains; they're a couple of guys who wander around while stuff happens to them. That's the only way to describe this book. The comic is well worth checking out, even for those who don't normally read comic books.

With the release of "Bloodshot," Valiant introduced their first vigilante. Bloodshot has been injected with living blood, which heals him quickly, gives him great strength and allows him to control machines. Bloodshot is trying to figure out how he became the way he is (he has no memory of his past life), and along the way he runs into most of the Mafia living in New York.

This book is very violent, which is slowly becoming a trademark of Valiant's books. Unlike Marvel or DC, which only hint at someone being shot and killed, Valiant holds nothing back.

Death seems real and permanent in Valiant's universe, and

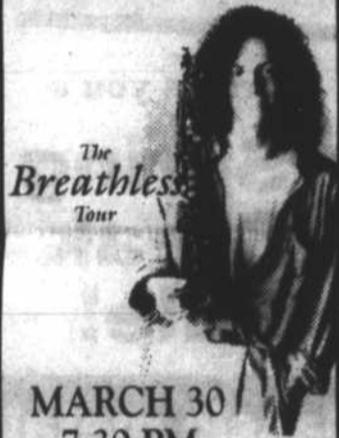
creates the feeling that anyone can die, even the hero. This reality is something that is seriously lacking at other companies where they kill someone and then bring them back on almost a monthly basis.

"Bloodshot" is a pretty good book, but it reveals Bloodshot's past in a disjointed way. If you like knockdown, drag-out fight scenes, this book is for you.

The only problem with the majority of Valiant back issues is that they are very quickly pricing themselves out of range for many collectors. Many early issues, which are only 2 years old or less, are nearing that \$100 mark. The very low print runs on those books (some as low as 35,000 copies, compared with the 500,000 copies of "Amazing Spiderman" that are circulated monthly), and the great demand causes the escalating prices. It is hoped that Valiant will start to reprint earlier issues as trade-paperbacks so that everyone can get and enjoy these excellent books.

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made any decision about the birth of my baby. I knew that having an abortion was not what I wanted. This was my body, my baby. I could actually feel the baby's movements. My baby was a person, a product of myself. At that point, I made an important decision to keep my baby. I started to think about not knowing any of my blood relatives (I was adopted), and my baby was the only person I could really relate to my being, my existence.

I had to take the next responsible and sensible step, one which would be in the best interest for myself as well as my unborn child. This meant that I had to tell my mother. This would be the hardest thing that I had ever done in my life.

When approaching my mother about my pregnancy, she explained to me that having a baby was not the worst thing in the world. She went on to say that she was glad that I didn't decide to have an abortion. After listening to my mother, a very heavy weight was lifted from my shoulders. I now knew that I could go on and that my life was not over. My mother continued to hold me.

Michael Louis was born Feb. 1, 1984, barely three months before the expected delivery date. He weighed 2 pounds, 5 ounces. The Lord had truly blessed him with amazingly good health considering how small he was at delivery.

This beautiful little baby was mine. I wondered how any mother could ever give such a beautiful treasure away. I decided that from that day on I would always love, take care of and be responsible for my son.



Photo courtesy of Yolanda Avidano

Yolanda Avidano gets a hug from her 9-year-old son, Michael.

The birth of my son had changed me in more ways than one. I have grown to be more responsible, more caring and more patient. I then began to look at myself for the first time and realized that I was important and that I now had a true bloodline connection. And I will always want my baby to know that his mother loves him very much and that he also is very important.

The birth of my baby marked the beginning of my life, and my life has been brightened with a purpose ever since.

Honestly speaking, I don't think I would be where I am right now if I didn't have my son by my side.

Michael Louis is a bright, caring, gentle, soft-spoken and loving little boy. He's my pride and joy. My son has brought so much happiness into my life, just by being by my side. He means so much to me. I want the world for him.

As each day passes I watch my little boy mature into this witty young man. He displays his love and affection for me every day.

Being a single parent has been

hard, but what in life isn't hard that is worth having. Michael Louis and I have a strong love we share with each other. The caring affection my son shows me through his patience makes me proud to be his mother.

The Lord has truly blessed me with a little boy who is a reflection of me, and I want to thank you, Lord, for giving me the opportunity to bring forth my bundle of joy.

Yolanda Avidano is a sophomore home economics major and a Diversions contributor.