

Usual Suspects

Goldfish

ISBN: 1582401950

By Brian Michael Bendis

Image Comics 2001

Before Brian Michael Bendis was *the guy* on everyone's writer list, before he had numerous comics produced at once, and before he helped Ultimate Spider-Man take off in cartoon form on MTV, he wrote some of the best damned crime noir comics all by his lonesome. His art, a wonderfully harsh black and white, as if everyone was caught by an extreme flash bulb, is perfect, and his writing, steeped in noir tradition and a keen awareness of how people actually talk, harkens what we all know now was to come. **Goldfish** was the first of these hefty crime tomes. Goldfish is, in fact, a man -- specifically, a con artist who's returned to the city of his youth on a mission. Calling in old favors, he arrives to discover that the landscape has changed a bit more than he had realized. His best friend, a con like himself, is now a detective, and his ex-girlfriend is leading the city's crime bosses. Despite the fish out of water feeling, Goldfish is determined to complete his task -- a personal need that slowly comes into focus through all the fast talk and double-crossing. A tragedy right up there with the greats of the genre, Goldfish remains of the favorites on my shelf.

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Jinx

ISBN: 1582401799

By Brian Michael Bendis

Image Comics 2001

In the sequel to Goldfish, again featuring his striking black and white artwork, all of the fallout from when we last saw Goldfish has settled somewhat. Goldfish still has a talent for persuasion and collecting less than stellar associates. That is, until he meets Jinx. Jinx is a bounty hunter ñ whip smart, just as much of a fighter as Goldfish, and with an attitude the most hardcore of the convicts she trails. She's also burned out in a thankless job, hovering somewhere between the law and the underworld. When these two loners' paths collide, things are bound to get exciting and, unfortunately, complicated. Add the abrasive Columbia to the mix (a character who looks, and apparently acts, like the author himself at his most obnoxious moments), and no one is safe.

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Torso

ISBN: 1582401748

By Brian Michael Bendis and Mark Andreyko

Image Comics 2001

Any film noir fans out there? You know, thuggish gangsters, whipsmart private detectives, dames with

attitude? In **Torso**, an Eisner Award winner, Brian Michael Bendis and Mark Andreyko retell the true story of what happened to Elliot Ness *after* his golden days of catching Al Capone. Promoted to Safety Director of the city of Cleveland, he seemed on top of the world -- little did he know that within weeks of taking the position, he would be faced with the first serial killer to stalk on American soil. By the finish, disgraced and beaten, Ness, when interviewed, insisted that the case was closed...but no one was ever convicted of the crime. Bendis and Andreyko piece together bits of the puzzle to shine light on their idea of the finish, to chilling and immensely satisfying effect.

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Powers

Who Killed Retro Girl?

ISBN: 158240223X

By Brian Michael Bendis

Art by Michael Avon Oeming

Image Comics 2001

What, Brian Michael Bendis again? I'll admit, I'm a wee bit biased, but he's also one of the few authors who consistently works in this genre. This time around, with Oeming's artwork a wonderful vision of traditionally bright animation cast into sharply shadowed relief, the tale starts in a world very much like our own. There are those who have Powers. No one's quite sure how it starts -- if it's in their genes or it's something acquired -- but those with Powers are responsible for using them as they see fit. They become either heroes or villains -- regular folks will be arrested if they so much as go near a costume without the correct pedigree. In this city, a regular cop has his hands full with Powers and civilians alike -- until someone commits the ultimate, unimaginable crime of murdering the best and brightest of them all, Retro Girl. Then Detective Christian Walker, with rookie partner Deena Pilgrim in tow, must investigate the ultimate of cases, forcing him to face his own secretive past.

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Powers

Roleplay

ISBN: 1582402329

By Brian Michael Bendis

Art by Michael Avon Oeming

Image Comics 2001

Powers continues to be one of the strongest and distinctive titles on the market, despite drawing on the familiar tropes of the superhero story and the gritty cop drama. Bendis, with all the usual wit, and slick artist Oeming make a dynamic creative duo and, like the best fiction, use the familiar setting and ideas to uncover greater themes that are smack in the middle of our own culture, superheroes or not. This time, Detectives Walker and Pilgrim are called upon to investigate the mysterious deaths of 3 college students on one night. That in itself makes the case a redball, but on top of that, in a world where you must be a licensed Power to wear a costume, all 3 dead bodies are dressed up as some of the best and brightest of the

Powers pantheon. As the title might clue you in, these kids were playing out roles, but just why were they all murdered? Old enemies return to haunt both Detectives and the strain of Walker's past is creeping ever nearer to the surface despite all his efforts to keep a low profile.

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Powers

Little Deaths

ISBN:1582402698

By Brian Michael Bendis

Art by Michael Avon Oeming

Image Comics 2002

Slyly commenting on our own media obsessed culture, this third volume of Powers features the fall of another hero, the Superman-like Olympia. Getting under the skin, so to speak, of such a towering figure is not only what every citizen wants to see but also may well be more than they should ask for. In such exposes, great idols fall and all anyone can remember is the scandal and the hot babes, not the heroism or the dedication to using powers for good. This volume is a little more scattered than the previous two, with a number of storylines that don't quite hang together. Then again, this is a cop show, basically, and the individual storylines are accomplished and intriguing. My favorite thing, by far, is the extremely funny and completely appropriate guest appearance of Warren Ellis, author of [The Authority](#) and [Transmetropolitan](#), as a civilian doing a ride-along with Detective Walker. Who better to comment on the world of Powers, and, I might add, be cracking one liners with great speed and agility?

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Powers

Supergroup

ISBN: 1582403090

By Brian Michael Bendis

Art by Michael Avon Oeming

Image Comics 2003

Never has there been a more fitting synergy between writer and artists than in **Powers**, and this volume is like the best song you've ever heard, the kind that rips out your heart and makes you close your eyes to feel it all a bit more. I was literally broken up by the time I had finished, staying up into the wee hours of the morning to make it to the end, and then flipping back and re-reading to savor the experience. Far from the slightly disjointed third volume, this fourth one brings all the threads that have been tangling in the background of Powers to the fore with a vengeance. Following the gruesome death of one of the members of the most popular superpowered group in the city, Walker and Pilgrim are chasing all over the city for the remaining two members trying to alternately apprehend and protect each. Little do they know the murder and its repercussions will run far deeper than a clean murder investigation. As the story unfolds, neither detective will be the same, and one will be shattered far beyond what most of us could stand. An excellent installment, a perfect marriage of art and word, and one kicker of a twist at the end make it awfully hard to

wait for the next tale.

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Catwoman: The Dark End of the Street

ISBN: 1563899086

by Ed Brubaker

Art by Darwyn Cooke, Mike Allred, Cameron Stewart

DC Comics 2002

" My world is all just shades of grey, Batman"

I love Catwoman. It's not just her slick black costume with the pointy ears or her way with a whip, it's her shades of gray. Catwoman is the most morally ambiguous of superhero characters. She's a villain, a cat-burglar, yet she also has a strong sense of justice. Plus, Batman once loved her. What keeps the Cat and the Bat apart is a question of worldview; for Selina Kyle, raised on the streets, a superhero's notion of good and evil is too simplistic. Ed Brubaker, one of the best writers in comics, has crafted a moving and brilliant story of Catwoman's return to life after being presumed dead for years. Selina Kyle needs some time off. She's not sure where she fits into the world anymore, and she doesn't want to be controlled by the mask she wears. Yet she also yearns to give something back to the streets from which she escaped. Returning to a secret safe house she set up for young girls working the street, Selina learns that a murderer is preying on Gotham's prostitutes. The police don't consider these victims worth their time, and even Batman doesn't have much sympathy for women who choose to break the law. If no one else will speak for them, maybe Catwoman can! Soon Selina is prowling the night in a new, more practical costume and tracking the serial killer. She'll soon learn, however, that the monster she seeks has his own shades of gray.

I can't say enough about **The Dark End of the Street**. The art is as good as the writing, if not better; Darwyn Cooke's elegant, film-noir style is a little bit like the incomparable Powers but has a retro verve all its own (when I use this many adjectives, you know it's got to be good!). Each panel adds to the nocturnal atmosphere of Catwoman's world. While the story deals with prostitution and violence, nothing is graphic or explicit. Part superhero comic, part detective story, **The Dark End of the Street** is really the story of a woman making peace with herself.

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The Road to Perdition

ISBN: 0743442245

by Max Allan Collins

Art by Richard Rayner

Pocket Books 2002

This one (surprise, surprise) has been getting a lot of press lately. Tom Hanks, Paul Newman, Jude Law, and Sam Mendes will do that to a story. I've not yet seen the film, though it's on my short list, but I can say without a doubt: read the book. **Road to Perdition** is a dark but illuminating tale of gangsters, circling

around the relationships of fathers and sons. Begun with the unnervingly small leap it takes a good man to commit an evil act, and then to grow accustomed to evil, this story is a noir tale at its heart. Full of murky morals, murkier characters, and hard-boiled attitude, the author and artist make you care deeply about O'Sullivan and his son as they head toward their inevitable conclusion. This tale is not for the squeamish: the violence is explicit and shocking, the black and white doing little to squelch the horror of what occurs. The true star of this title is the artwork, hands down. Yes, the dialogue is fine, though not as sparkling as Bendis' **Torso**, but you can tell by looking at any page that the art took four painstaking years. It shows in the fine detail of a 30s city street and in the pained expressions that cross Michael O'Sullivan's face. In the end, those eloquent lines provides the moment of release and redemption that you realizing you've been holding your breath for the entire time.

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Catwoman: Selina's Big Score

ISBN: 1563898977

by Darwyn Cooke

Color by Matt Hollingsworth

DC Comics 2002

Selina Kyle is about to come back from the dead, but she needs some money first. Much as she hates returning to Gotham, one last "big score" will help her start a new life. When "working girl" Chantal comes along with information about a train-load of dirty Mafia money, Selina sees a chance to help a girl like her former self escape a life of exploitation. To pull off this heist, Selina will have to confront her past in more ways than one. She'll need some friends in Gotham. Above all she'll need master-thief Stark, the man who took her off the streets and gave her the skills she would later use as Catwoman. There's just one problem: the last time Selina saw Stark, she betrayed him. Will he trust her again?

Selina's Big Score overlaps in time with **The Dark End of the Street**, weaving in Selina's encounters with private detective Slam Bradley. We learn what happens between their first meeting and the return of the new Catwoman. It's a nail-biting crime story with an explosive ending; Selina might steal herself a new life, but not without paying a horrible price. The subject matter is pretty adult, but the presentation is impeccably tasteful. Crime and noir fans will love this critically acclaimed graphic novel, and Catwoman fans will love seeing Selina in action without her mask. I've already enthused about Darwyn Cooke's gorgeous art in **The Dark End of the Street**, and his writing is a worthy partner for his elegant style. What really stands out in **Selina's Big Score** is Matt Hollingsworth's color; the pages are awash with bright, bold hues that glow against Cooke's dramatic shadows.

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Skinwalker

ISBN: 1929998457

By Nunzio DeFillipis and Christina Weir

Art by Brian Hurtt and Arthur Dela Cruz

Oni Press 2003

Just to be clear from the start: this is not a comic version of a Tony Hillerman novel. **Skinwalker** does combine some of the same elements of those tales: grim Navajo legends apparently come to life, a reluctant partnership, this time between a member of the Navajo Tribal Police and a FBI hotshot profiler on the way to the top. Gregory Haworth just wants to get to the point where he can do his work **and** get the credit for it with his own team, but a mysterious plea from an old partner leads him, on his last few days of vacation, to Dinehotso within Navajo Country. Despite getting off on entirely the wrong foot with local officer Anne Adakai, Haworth insists on staying once his old partner is discovered hideously murdered -- skinned alive. Covering everything from myths to procedure and all the emotions that can get tangled up in intense investigations and opposing cultures, **Skinwalker** is a welcome addition to the piles of crime and horror comics out there. Hurtt's delicate penciling alongside Dela Cruz's rich graytones lend the whole visual a suitably oppressive air and make the horror all the more overwhelming. Echoing the **X-Files** and FBI profiler tales everywhere, **Skinwalker** nonetheless maintains a solid and engaging tale surrounding two very believably hard-assed and vulnerable characters fighting for the truth against more enemies than they bargained for. On top of all that, without any fanfare, **Skinwalker** finally allows for some diversity in our comics heroes, featuring a Navajo woman who is neither ridiculously mythical nor love-interest-only material. Her biting, conflicted, intelligent personality alone is worth the read. The horror is very true, here, as well -- rather than slasher antics, **Skinwalker** is filled with suspense and just enough gore to give you a glimpse of the horror without being prurient or stomach-turning.

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Kabuki

By David Mack

Image Comics 2001-2004

Kyoto, Japan: the calm of a rainy night in the not-too-distant future is punctuated by a brutal murder inside one of the city's most notorious nightclubs. As the words Target:Confirmed:Terminate play across our vision, a masked figure carrying two sickle-shaped knives leaves the area. The scene is set. [read more...](#)

Or on to the individual volumes in the series:

[Kabuki: Circle of Blood \(1\)](#)

[Kabuki: Dreams \(2\)](#)

[Kabuki: Masks of Noh \(3\)](#)

[Kabuki: Skin Deep \(4\)](#)

[Kabuki: Metamorphosis \(5\)](#)

[Kabuki: Scarab \(6\)](#)

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Sin City

By Frank Miller

Art by Frank Miller
Dark Horse

Sin City is a series in which the men are real men, and the women are real women. Except truthfully, not so much. Sin City is the creation of Frank Miller and he's writing noir at it's very best. His heroes are men trying to do the honorable thing in dishonorable world, his heroines are prostitutes who own their own destinies, and his villains are sexual predators and duplicitous women ...[Read More](#)

The Complete Series

[Sin City: The Hard Goodbye](#) (Volume 1)
[Sin City: A Dame to Kill For](#) (Volume 2)
Sin City: The Big Fat Kill (Volume 3)
Sin City: That Yellow Bastard (Volume 4)
Sin City: Family Values (Volume 5)
Sin City: Booze, Broads, and Bullets (Volume 6)
[Sin City: Hell and Back](#) (Volume 7)

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Top 10: Book One

ISBN: 1563896680

By Alan Moore, Gene Ha, Zander Cannon

America's Best Comics, 1999

It's early morning in my favorite alternate reality, and Officer Robyn 'Toy Box' Slinger has just boarded a train for her first day on the job as a member of the Neopolis City Police Force (aka Top 10). Neopolis was built by a group of crazed German architects at the end of World War Two, and by 1999 has become a labyrinthine, overstimulating habitat for humans, machines, aliens, and mythical beings with superpowers. The city's denizens manage to live together about as harmoniously as you'd expect for a few million superheroes ... which is to say, not harmoniously at all. In response to each new disaster, Top 10 gallops, rolls, flies, and explodes through Neopolis' back alleys and main thoroughfares, mixing a lot of wittiness with their superhuman abilities. When Robyn joins the force, the Ghostly Goose is still at large, a blind, Zen Buddhist cabby has wrecked havoc with the city's traffic patterns, tenements are being taken over by vermin capable of altering the space-time continuum, and the Libra Killer has struck again. It's up to the new recruit to take on the strangest group of criminals you'd ever hope to meet, and at the same time to find a place for herself in the loving, gossiping, dysfunctional family that is Top 10.

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Top 10: Book Two

ISBN: 1563899663

By Alan Moore, Gene Ha, Zander Cannon

America's Best Comics, 2000

Step outside. Cars are flying through the air, and all around you people, robots, and aliens are levitating, inflating like balloons, blowing up buildings, and becoming invisible. Yes, we're back in Neopolis with the Top 10 police force, just in time to clean up a giant interstellar car accident involving a living chess piece the size of a high rise building. Man, I love this city. Picking up where Book One leaves us, Top 10 is moving ever closer to rounding up one of the city's most important covert crime rings. The newest case, however, turns out to be much more than a routine operation, and crime fighting in Neopolis takes our heroes and heroines into ever murkier and more disturbing situations. While the crime scenes multiply, the team gains a new member, and Police Commissioner Ultima arrives from an alternate reality for a surprise inspection. As Top 10 delves deeper into the seedier aspects of their city, the story line occasionally veers into subject matter only appropriate for older readers, but Alan Moore and company brilliantly maintain the same hilarity and emotion I loved in Book One.

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V for Vendetta

ISBN: 0930289528

By Alan Moore

Art by David Lloyd

Warner Books 1995

An excellent title, this book is also the hardest to define or explain -- like much of Alan Moore's groundbreaking work. An alternate history has unfolded -- after America has bombed Africa and Europe and governments have collapsed into chaos, a fascist regime has risen in what is left of England and is now strict and powerful in their rule. This police state, however, has a lot of dirty secrets to hide, and one man, the enigmatic and poetic V, has taken it upon himself to carefully, but irrevocably, tear down the government. Not for the faint of heart, **V for Vendetta** is a brutal but intriguing look at the true meaning of anarchy and individual freedom.

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Hawaiian Dick: Byrd of Paradise

ISBN: 1582403171

by B. Clay Moore

Art by Steven Griffin

Image Comics, 2003

Hawaiian Dick reminds me of those great 1950s crime dramas, full of speeding cars, jumpin' jazz scores, and tough P.I.'s looking for balancing shaky moral ground. It's full of great reaction shots, car chases, snappy dialogue, and a few zombies. Wondering about the zombies, are ya? Not too many scenes of Bogie staring down the walking dead, but I'm all for it. This first volume follows the wavering career of Byrd (gotta dig the single name), a cop exiled from the mainland and cooling his heels on Hawaii trying to make a buck. He and his old army buddy, Detective Mo Kalama, get roped into a dubious case trying to retrieve a

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Ruse: Enter the Detective

ISBN: 1931484198

by Mark Waid

Art by Butch Guice

CrossGen 2002

I am a huge fan of Sherlock Holmes mysteries. I love period mysteries of all sorts, but nothing quite beats