

Hollywood and Comics

By Tricia Sparks

Hollywood's fascination with comic books has been an ongoing thing. Superhero movies are on the rise and a lot of that stems from the recent changes in Computer Generated imaging. As technology has caught up with the imagination the film industry has shown an increased interest in comic books. Evidence of this can be seen in the past years titles. Films such as Spider Man 3 released 2007, Iron Man 2008, The Incredible Hulk in 2008 and the latest release Punisher Warzones out earlier this month are just a few of the latest comic book films to hit the screen.

As a Comic book fan while I'm happy to see this, but I have to wonder as a writer why there is such a growing interest in Comic books for the big screen? What is it about these characters from another generation that draws us to them? Is the sudden trend due to a lack of creativity in Hollywood to create something original? Or are we seeing production companies deciding to draw a pre existing fan base as a solution to the fall off in movie theatre attendance?

In this writers humble opinion there are multiple things that are contributing to the trend. One is that in our dark reality where survival of the fittest is the jungle law these characters portrayed live by a code similar to that of the romanticized medieval knights. We are drawn to their moral code and the idea of standing up for your fellow man and seeing justice served.

I think another part is that ideas in Hollywood are in a lull. We saw some amazing things come out at the advent of this new technology but now it seems like the focus is only on special FX and the art of storytelling is suffering as a result. Whatever the reason these are the facts comic book film are on a hot streak at the moment and Hollywood is riding the wave. But when did this craze start?

Hollywood's love affair with Comics first began with appearances on the screen as serial cartoon movies in 1941. Titles such as Superman, Batman and Captain America started the trend. The first big blockbuster comic book movie was Superman in 1978 and Tim Burton's Batman would follow in 1989. After that many titles would follow taking their chance at the big screen a few of these are The Crow in 1994, Image's Spawn 1997 and Marvel's Ghost Rider 2007. These are just a few examples of comic books in film.

Over the years there have been multiple comic book films released as a series the one credited as the first real successful comic book series was Blade 1998 Blade 2 released in 2002 and Blade Trinity in 2004. Others more recently done as a series include X-men in 2000 X2: X-men United in 2003 and X-men Last Stand in 2006, as well as The Fantastic Four in 2005 and Fantastic Four: Rise of the silver Surfer in 2007.

Several comic book films have been remade over the years as the improvements in technology have risen. Superman was first released in 1978 ran three sequels up through 1987 and then in 2006 Superman Returns was released. This particular remake is interesting in that it follows the events of the first and second movies from the original series but acts as if the third and fourth never happened. The Punisher is another released in 1989 originally it was remade in 2004, and the most recent Red Sonja originally released in 1985 slated for release in 2009 of the remakes though one series has managed to rise above all the others and that is Batman which has been redone three times and each with some success.

Batman, first released in 1966 based off the T.V. series. It was reinvented in 1989 by Tim Burton and ran until 1997 with Batman and Robin when most felt the franchise was dead. The series was resurrected from the ashes and recreated again successfully in 2005 with Batman Begins but the latest in Batman films The Dark Knight of 2008 is the talk in Hollywood. With its huge success the Dark Knight was recently named the highest grossing comic book movie in history as well as highest earning domestic film of the first decade of the 21st century to date this trend looks to be on the rise as over twenty comic book films are slated for release from 2009 to 2011. A couple of these titles Marvel's spin off, such as X-men Origins Wolverine, and Top Cow's Witchblade.

It's no surprise to find that with these latest bouts with success the comic book craze is spreading beyond Hollywood. With the industry trend towards crossing genre some fiction writers are taking their stories and translating them into graphic novels. Ted Dekker's popular trilogy Black, White, Red can now be found in the comic book section of your book store as well as Steven King's Dark Tower Series, Laura K. Hamilton's Anita Blake, Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman's The Dragon Lance trilogy and even J.R.R. Tolkien's the Hobbit and Lord of the Rings have all been translated to comic book media. With the chase for comic books in Hollywood who knows; maybe a book translated to graphic novel will become the next desired comic book film.

As writers in this multimedia age we must be well versed in writing in all its forms. We can't afford to ignore or dismiss any form of storytelling just because it's different from what we're used to because we never know how our work may be translated.