

Pop Comics

The Working Definition

From The Desk of Warren Ellis

30 May 2001

By Popular Request.

So Shut Up If You've Heard It Before.

The basic definition of the Pop Comic is a finite, commercially accessible, inventive and intelligent modern comics work. A cultural handgrenade, short, bright and inexpensive. An art bomb, cheap as a single and demanding as much of your time. Three of four issues, or a short original graphic novel. Open – ended ongoing titles are your dad's comics. And your dad probably listens to Genesis.

The Pop Comic is, in my mind, the direct competitor to the major-company superhero comic. Pop Comics are fast delivery systems for explosive storytelling, as much flash and thunder as your ideal superhero comic, with more innovation -- and operating in other genres. There are many reasons why superhero comics are subculturally "sticky", and one is that their core approach is basically crack for people who like action fiction.

And the Pop Comic is creator-owned.

In conversation with another writer, he told me that his career approach is to alternate mainstream stuff with creator-owned stuff. As if the act of ownership takes the latter work out of the comics mainstream. How much sense does that make? Why not just take over the mainstream and remake it in our own images? It's been done before.

People forget that. SPAWN owned the top ten for most of the Nineties, an incoherent but energetic mix of horror and the superhero that was, wait for it, creator-owned. People don't buy creator-owned books, the old guard dribble. Right. I'm not saying they're not a tough sell, but please. What bollocks.

The mainstream, in comics, means superhero books. That's something that needs to change. There's no special dispensation for comics that means that here "mainstream" equals "men in tights wrestling each other in the street" when everywhere else means pretty much anything BUT men in very tight costumes wrestling each other in the street.

Let's allow ourselves to tell the stories we want without consigning ourselves to the guesses of what is already back-alley medium when doing so.

The Pop Comic is about introducing new readers to the medium. They are minimum-commitment works. The rise of the TPB and its sales outside the comics store show clearly that people want to buy a story *quickly*. They don't want to be married to a comics store. They don't want to have to come in at the same time every month in order to piece a massive story together.

Three issues is a minimum commitment, a fair compromise with the current economic realities within the industry today.