

Makeshift Musings and Comic Book Bliss
By Jim Zubkavich

I read some Transmetropolitan while on the streetcar this morning. It's a great story about these people who've been revived from cryogenic sleep and suddenly realize that society has no place for people from the past- just as they themselves can't come to grips with the evolution that has happened around them. When it's over, you feel the loneliness, confusion and heartache that grip these people. After I finished reading it, I looked at the people on the train and wondered how many of them could relate to that story.

I'm sure at first glance some of the people around me assumed that somebody my age reading comic books obviously had a stunted youth. If I was cackling with glee reading Archie or Pokemon, I might agree. They don't know that Transmetropolitan has inventive and thought provoking stories, but I think someday they will.

Fans whine and say, "Things were better when sales were in the hundreds of thousands and everyone was reading comics..."

It's true that during the Image boom, sales were impressive and comics were a staple hobby. But how many of those stories do you look back on now? How many are worth showing to your friends? How many gatefold, hologram, glow-in-the-dark, scratch and sniff covered books had compelling characters and interesting plots?

These days, I can lend out an issue of Fables or show someone the Circleweave online and not feel like it's in the same category as The Death/Rebirth of Superman. The industry's changing and when this chrysalis stage is complete, many of the best stories that are coming out now will be fondly remembered. They're the first wave of a stronger market filled with diversity for any audience. People will pick them up off the shelves and will click through to them on the web.

Comics are practically an underground market again and that makes us the perfect underdog. It becomes a cool thing because it's not mainstream anymore. Comic book movies may make millions and flood the box office, but the actual publishing end of it is way out on the fringe. Without the almighty dollar driving the collector market and with the widespread proliferation of web comics, it has incredible potential to grow into a mature storytelling medium instead of the POW BAM BIFF ZOWIE it was before.

We have to spear head these changes and recognize our potential. If we don't let the industry adapt and grow, it'll end up like that Transmetropolitan story I read on the streetcar: the fans coming out of a frozen superhero-dominated sleep to see that the industry's not what it used to be. People lost in the memories and glory of what was, instead of what is to be.

I see the future with open eyes instead. The comic medium is as flexible as any other. The material that matters more than ever is simple: stories with substance.