Josh Berg

Watchmen Review

Writer Alan Moore first conceived the idea for *Watchmen* with this idea in mind:

I suppose I was just thinking, 'That'd be a good way to start a comic book: have a famous super-hero found dead.' As the mystery unraveled, we would be led deeper and deeper into the real heart of this super-hero's world, and show a reality that was very different to the general public image of the super-hero.

Of course, his ideas of how this would be carried out in a somewhat different way than he envisioned them, an experience ubiquitous in the world of literary fiction. Moore originally wanted to use characters conceived for other lines of comics "so it would have the shock and surprise value when you saw what the reality of these characters was". DC was less receptive to this idea because they didn't want their expensive and profitable characters being killed off, an outcome not unlikely given the previous writings of Alan Moore.

Before *Watchmen* was written, Moore was already somewhat established as a comic writer. His creation of *Swamp Thing* had helped bring to life the now popular DC comic line Vertigo. The creation of *Swamp Thing* also spawned character John Constantine, a character that would become the protagonist of Vertigo comic *Hellblazer.* In turn this comic acted as a stepping stone for many British writers such as Garth Ennis, Grant Morrison and Neil Gaiman.

Watchmen is very successful in what it sets off to do. Because of this, it is a contender for #1 graphic novel in my heart (an important title). Of course it would have to overcome the difficult if not impossible task of beating out Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*. Interestingly enough *Watchmen* has a special thanks to Gaiman. This most likely due to the connection between Neil Gaiman and Alan Moore through Vertigo comics and *Hellblaze.* If you were to compare the works of Gaiman such as *The Sandman* to *Watchmen*, you'd see *Watchmen* as allegorical and far more direct. *Watchmen* is more laconic in the messages that it tries to deliver. That being said, I think the way that a lot of the tale is presented in the graphic novel medium has a more transcendental meaning and really encompasses a lot of what I love about graphic novels. *Watchmen* uses the medium to the fullest extent as opposed to relying on it as a crutch for a subpar and superficial story. The way it presents parallels between different stories and character's lives by using visuals is something only possible in this medium.

Watchmen is a multilayered story wherein the reader can choose how they want to read and how much they want to analyze. With a lot of the work Gaiman does with his non-graphic novels as well as his graphic ones, the writing is slightly denser than that of Moore. However, both authors are very allegorical if one chooses to looks at them through that lens. The lens that *Watchmen* uses to look at the world is one of alternate history. Despite it being a DC comic about superheroes it does not fall under the category of superhero fiction. To label it as another superhero story doesn't fully do it justice. *Watchmen* uses heroes as an element of an alternative history. The focal point of the story is the heroes, but it really is a tale of the human condition and first and foremost.

  While reading *Watchmen* I caught myself rereading pages and justifying it in my mind by thinking that I might have missed text. It isn't that the book couldn't keep my attention or anything of that sort. Missing anything was not an option. It had been quite a while since a book had captivated me to that extent. There was always something to see on all of the pages as there was a lot of imagery and detail. Unfortunately the wonderful imagery and design of *Watchmen* lies awfully close to its weakest point, that being the art style. *Watchmen* has a comic book art style through and through and it really is a shame because many of the visual elements included in this style are excellent. I think the reason for this somewhat bland style is that anything just wasn't commonly seen at this point. Although I am sure that Gibbons was aware of the Vertigo scene in which different art styles were and are mostly used, they just stuck with the norm. It is no huge sin by any means because the art still looks good and I really liked the design of a lot of the characters and environments, just the way they chose to display these things is not the most exciting.

  The obvious person to recommend *Watchmen* to is the lover of graphic novels and comics. There is no doubt that those who like visuals with their text should be given this as a recommendation, however it would be a mistake to not recommend this to most people. Even for those who have little experience with this sort of medium, it could certainly serve as a starting point. Anyone who is interested in different perceptions of morality on a grand and even somewhat smaller scale will get a kick out of *Watchmen*. Hell, anyone who just wants to read a good story couldn't do too bad by reading *Watchmen*.

Title:
Watchmen
Publisher:
DC Comics
Writer:
Alan Moore
Artist:
Dave Gibbons
Colorist:
John Higgins
Genre:
Alternate History, Graphic Novel
Pages:
416

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