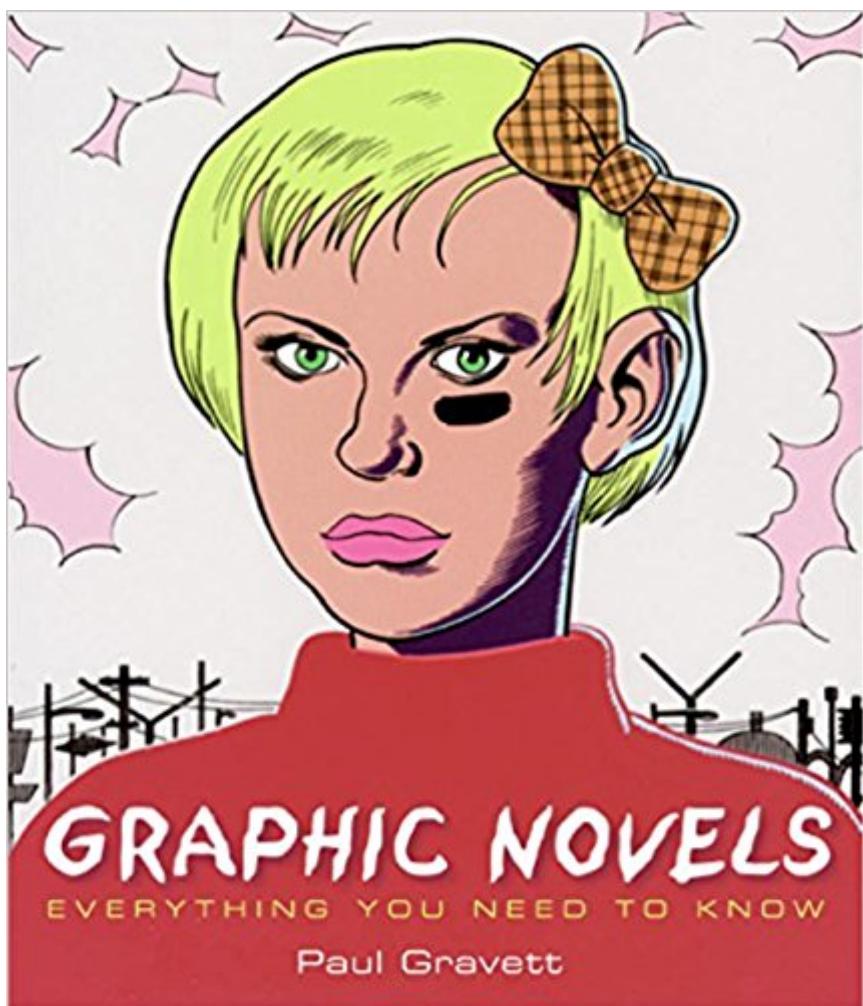


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# Graphic Novels: Everything You Need To Know



## Synopsis

Graphic novels, long stories told in comics format, have enjoyed the fastest-growing sales of any category of book in the U.S. over the last four years. This modern renaissance of comics has produced a library of substantial works, whose subjects are not confined to superheroes or fantasy but are as varied and sophisticated as the best films and literature. *Graphic Novels* presents an accessible, entertaining, and highly illustrated guide to the diversity of contemporary comics in book form. Featuring striking graphics and explanatory extracts from a wide range of graphic novels, the book examines the specific language of the comics medium; the history and pioneers of the form; recent masterpieces from Art Spiegelman's *Maus* to Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan*; the impact of Japanese manga and European albums translated into English; how artists have overcome prejudices towards the genre; and the ambitious range of themes and issues artists are addressing, including childhood, war and survival, politics, the future, sexuality, and the supernatural.

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Grade 9 Up. "This is a wonderful primer for someone new to the genre or who is starting a graphic-novel collection. Gravett does an excellent job of acknowledging that there are things to hate about comics and he confronts them head on, with explanations and suggestions for future reading. Next he offers a classics list of 30 of his favorite titles. Most of them are well known and are considered must-haves in any collection, such as Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen* (DC Comics, 1995), Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (Knopf, 1993), and Neil Gaiman's *The*

Sandman series (DC Comics). The rest of the book examines those titles and others like them, showing sample pages with directions on how to read them and pointing out themes, keywords, and special features. This oversize volume has glossy, full-color pages and an easy-to-read text. Some of the sexier examples of graphic novels are included, such as Robert Crumbs *My Troubles with Women* (Last Gasp, 1991). A useful, informative book for anyone who wants to become better versed in the genre. *©Melissa T. Jenvey, New York Public Library Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.*

Anyone who wants a handle on that suddenly hot new format, the graphic novel, should seize upon this useful, incisive, intelligently arranged guide. Gravett analyzes 30 key graphic novels ("stories to change your life") in generic or topical chapters that bring together, say, alternative comics products such as *Maus* and *Jimmy Corrigan*, or superhero standouts such as *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*. For readers inspired to investigate further, he follows each discussion of a particular book with selections from four similar graphic novels. Entire pages from the work under discussion appear, indicating its quality far better than a panel or two would. Gravett's analyses are concise and perceptive, and his introductory remarks in each chapter are knowledgeable. He has long been associated with the British alt-comics movement, which allows him to recommend a number of notable British and European graphic novels that likely would have been overlooked by a more American-centered book. Even the most well-versed comics fan will discover new treasures here, and newbies to the field may consider it indispensable. *Gordon FlaggCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved*

When I bought this a few years ago, I had a few graphic novels and some comics, but this book was a revelation. Inside were some of the familiar titles such as "Watchmen", "The Airtight Garage" (which I read years ago in Heavy Metal magazine), "The Sandman", "Preacher" and a few others, but after reading it I started hunting for the ones I didn't have, the vast majority of which I never heard of. Without it I probably wouldn't have enjoyed such gems as "The Frank Book", "Space Dog", "Epileptic", "The Spiral Cage" and many, many more. Now that it is now going on fifteen years I would recommend this to people to explore some of the older books before they become too hard to find. It would be nice if Gravett would bring out an updated version, but that's not really necessary if you use this guide to get you started. Also, paulgravett.com has ongoing articles every month to keep the reader up to date on what's coming up, backdated to September 2005.

Not nearly comprehensive enough or insightful enough to live up to its title.

I was looking for something to give me a firm history of this "new" genre of fiction and this proved very useful. The author seems to have a firm understanding of how the reader's eye moves about (especially comic book readers) and keeps his format as true to his subject matter as possible. He allows the reader to skip ahead, and around; dig deep in the subject matter, or theme; run rampant around the page. I couldn't recommend this book more for those who are unfamiliar with graphic novels, aspire to write one, or just plain enjoy the history. I loved the way that the author stuck to mature subject matter/ writers as well. Fantastic!

Besides being a visual fascination, the text of Paul Gravett makes you travelling through the stories of the stories presented in the book and wanting to read all the Graphic Novels beautifully analyzed. A book recommended for the more hardcore fans who want to expand even further their horizons and also for those who want to start venturing into the wonderful world of more diversified comics.

My husband LOVED this book and was very excited to look at through it. It inspired him to create some of his own graphic art!

I will pass on writing a review. Let others do this. This is a thought in progress when it come to this book.

This is a great primer on how and why to read graphic literature (traditionally known as "comic books") as well as an excellent catalog of the best works of sequential art (for an enlightening exploration of just what sequential art is and how it works, read Scott McCloud's seminal *Understanding Comics*). This attractively designed book contains detailed two-page entries on 30 works considered classics by the author (with whom I concur--at least on the ones I've read), and slightly less detailed half page entries on 120 others (see images at the top of item description), all of which provide sample pages and analysis of the storytelling technique employed by the creator(s). (Unfortunately, the text on the half page reproductions is sometimes too small to read without the aid of a magnifying glass.) The book is divided into chapters arranged by subject matter, which begin with a background essay on the history of each genre and contain a sidebar with a brief list of additional recommendations (totaling another 100 in all). The genres covered are Childhood Stories, Life Stories, War, Superheroes (of course), Fantasy/Science Fiction, Horror,

Mystery/Crime, Humor/Satire, Historical (fiction and non), and Erotica. While I highly recommend this book for people trying to familiarize themselves with the realm of graphic novels, the subtitle, "Everything You Need to Know," is not entirely accurate. The focus here is on English language comics. For a sampling of graphic literature from around the globe, check out *The Essential Guide to World Comics* by Tim Pilcher and Brad Brooks. However, my only real disappointment was with the lack of attention given to some creators, and the total absence of others. The most glaring of these is the cursory mention of Grant Morrison, one of the greatest comic book writers of the past 20 years. Although *Animal Man* and *The Invisibles* are mentioned in two of the book's auxiliary sidebar lists, neither these nor any of Morrison's other works--which include *Arkham Asylum*, *Doom Patrol*, *JLA: Earth 2*, and *The Mystery Play*--are featured in the more in-depth two page or half page formats. (I can excuse the absence of what I think is possibly Morrison's greatest work, *WE3*, because it came out in graphic novel form after Gravett's book went to press.) Several of the overlooked Morrison works listed above would have been much deserving additions to what I consider the weakest chapter in the book, "The Superhuman Condition." While I understand the author's desire to direct readers' attention to the wealth of non superhero graphic novels out there, this chapter--one of the shortest in the book--failed to mention several of the best examples of superheroic fiction. These would include tales featuring well-established characters, such as *JSA: The Golden Age*, by James Robinson and Paul Smith, as well as less traditional works like *The Authority*, a series created by Warren Ellis and Bryan Hitch about an antiestablishment group of superhumans (although in my opinion, it was later writer Mark Millar who more fully developed the revolutionary elements of this series). In general, I think this chapter suffered from a too narrow definition of what defines a superhero story, depriving readers of the full potential of this genre. The addition of Paul Chadwick's *Concrete*, while not obviously a superhero series, would have shown how superhuman trappings can be used to tell very human stories that address real-world injustices. Similarly, I would have placed in this chapter graphic novels Gravett chose to include elsewhere in his book. Morrison's *The Invisibles* is mentioned under the heading of science fiction/fantasy; *V for Vendetta*, by Alan Moore and David Lloyd, is extensively covered in the chapter on mystery/crime, and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, by Moore and Kevin O'Neill, appears under horror. Chronicling the stories of 1) a counterculture cell of secret agents battling extradimensional forces of conformity (*The Invisibles*); 2) a masked superhuman freedom-fighter seeking to overthrow the fascist government of an Orwellian future (*V*); and 3) a band of characters from Victorian literature serving on Her Majesty's Secret Service in an alternative version of 19th Century Britain (*The League*); I

believe these works should more fittingly be viewed as innovative takes--postmodern, dystopian, and revisionist, respectively--on the superhero genre. Despite these shortcomings, I still think this book offers an attractive, well-organized, and exciting introduction to the world of graphic literature that is sure to hold many unexpected treasures for long time fans and newcomers alike. [Note: Some of the best recent superhero stories were not included in this book because they were released in graphic novel form while it was already at press. DC: The New Frontier, by Darwyn Cooke, takes a new look at the Silver Age of comics (the 1950s and 60s) that is as retro as it is modern, and the critically-acclaimed Ex Machina, by Brian K. Vaughan and Tony Harris, is about a superhero who hangs up his costume after 9/11 to become the mayor of New York City.]

This book is a marvelous and very thorough reference book for graphic novels published in the US market. I am grateful since I needed a "taxonomy" of sorts for the newly available works, and the differently-themed chapters seem to group the various works into categories. While the tradition of the graphic novel has been strong in Europe in the sixties and seventies, many of those works have never been translated into English, and thus references to them are not included in this book. I was pleased to see Hugo Pratt's "The Ballad of the Salted Sea", a revered classic among European readers. I must conclude that the only reason it got included in this book is because it is now available in English. I noticed *Persepolis* got included as well. That work has been "cinematized" recently, and shown at this year's Cannes Film Festival. [btw, the English set is half the price of the French set if you were to buy it in France, proof that the English-based publishing world dominates the world...] Great book. Great resource. Great reference.

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