

Comic-book retailers hope blockbusters boost business

By CAROLYN STEEVES

This year's leading men are an odd mix of billionaire playboys with superhero identities, super-secret government agents or overexposed scientists with anger issues.

The major movie players of the summer — Batman, Iron Man, Hellboy and the Hulk — all have one thing in common: They started in comic books. That's true for many box office contenders of recent years as well. They've included such similar big-name hero franchises as Spider-Man, the X-Men, the Fantastic Four and Superman, but also lesser-known stars from graphic novels with cult followings that first exploded into the broader pop-culture lexicon with their big-screen forays, including this year's *Wanted*, the recent *V for Vendetta* and *300*, and the soon-to-be-released *Watchmen*.

Such films often draw in millions in movie tickets, but what happens to the sales of the comics they came from?

According to one local retailer specializing in comics, box office gold often translates into a boom in print sales.

Shawn Reynolds, manager of Heroes Aren't Hard to Find comic-book store in Charlotte, told **The Mecklenburg Times** she's clearly seen comic-book movies stimulate sales. That success in some cases, such as *Iron Man*, can be really surprising.

"There wasn't really a high demand for a lot of (Iron Man) comics before, not like Batman, so we were caught a little off guard," she said. "We ordered a bunch of Iron Man stuff after the movie because a lot of people came in asking for it, people who hadn't been in the store and weren't very familiar with the comics, but loved the movie."

In the past week, *The Dark Knight* has broken records, generated Oscar buzz and been discussed by nearly everyone. The movie took the record for biggest opening weekend, generating more than \$155 million in ticket sales. Prior to the caped crusader, another comic book hero held the

record: Spider-Man. The record was \$151 million, which *Spider-Man 3* generated its opening weekend.

Demand for Batman is typically high, but Reynolds noted that they are now selling out of copies of *The Killing Joke*, *The Long Halloween* and a few other Joker-based books.

Sometimes movies, or even trailers, can revive interest in comic books, or expose a new generation to older titles. Audiences viewing *The Dark Knight* have been treated to a trailer for *Watchmen*, based on the 1986 limited series by Alan Moore.

"Tons of people came in saying, 'I just saw the preview and I want to read *Watchmen*,'" Reynolds said, "to the point that we were sold out and we ordered five more (*Watchmen*) and we might be sold out of those." DC Comics is preparing to re-release a *Watchmen* edition to tie in with the movie.

For every successful screen adaptation, there have been the countless flops, with *Daredevil*, *Elektra*, *Ghost Rider* and *Catwoman*, among the most spectacular recent disasters of campy costumes, bad writing and audience indifference.

In those cases, a comic book movie doesn't always mean increased sales. The comic sales can even suffer. Such was the case with 2005's *Elektra*, based on the series from Marvel Comics. The movie was not well-received by fans or critics and people showed little interest in the books. A planned video game was also dropped.

With a slew of big name movies slated for release next year, comic book stores could be in for more traffic and sales. Or long-running franchises could be left exposed by a lousy screen version.

Guess right and stores can capitalize on the movie hype. Guess wrong and they can be left with reams of unsold books and related merchandise.

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