Delusions of Civil War

Contributed by MN
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Tom Spurgeon of The Comics Reporter, takes to task recent cultural pundits' obsession with Marvel Comics' Civil War series (and Superhero comics in general) as a framework for in-depth sociopolitical commentary. His critcism notes the difficulty in sending a serious message about pertinent issues through stories which focus on fantastical powers and gimmickry of its characters, within marketing priorities of mainstream publishers, which have little to do with sincere concern over social issues:

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The well opined criticism, a Spurgeon specialty, evokes a similar sentiment expressed some time ago in Where We Stand, from The New Comic Book of Life web site:

A different concern, however, lurks under the surface of the publisher's mind. A publisher might agree that there's a good message to be put forth with these superheroes, but their concern is to make sure it's packaged in a way as to be commercial and entertaining, which is not always equivalent to the moral value the superheroes represent. A publisher plays up the fantasy elements and super powers of his superhero stories and not the moral and ethical standards they exude. Superman can fly, Batman has a Batcave and Wonder Woman wields a magic lasso - that's superhero comics.

Marvel's Aubry Sitterson responded to the criticism (which wasn't necessarily directed at Marvel) by supporting the plausibility of Marvel speaking on serious issues - and invoked the remembrance of other famed comics and literature works with a fantasy orientation, which did appear to succeed in putting forth an impression of making effective sociopolitical statements. Among the works mentioned are Watchmen and The Time Machine - as well as authors such as C.S. Lewis, Chandler, Howard and Lovecraft.

While Tom Spurgeon has not yet responded to Sitterson (and may well not, also) it does appear that Marvel's representative front line soldier, sent to defend its virtue in the face of this criticism, has somewhat missed the point made. The rush to compare Civil War with the other works mentioned, while not intending to detract from Mark Millar's piercing insight into perinent issues, percolates with a scent of self-aggrandizement, not necessarily behooving its source, nor the enterprise it represents. The Superhero constraints Tom Spurgeon notes, which limit the serious appeal of any commentary put forth by Civil War, is the essential issue which the comics industry needs to contend with when basking in such accolades as have been poured upon this particilar series.

It is not necessarily impossible to achieve more depth with such stroies in the comics. It simply needs first to be understood that the special effects, action and adventure hype priorities being focused upon presently, must eventually

take a back seat to the more pertinent story content. For sociopolitical commentary to be effective, it must first strike a cord of sincerity currently lacking within the commercial marketing zeal that mainstream comics operate under. One reason Alan Moore's Watchmen succeeded in breaking these limitations is that the writer himself wasn't concerned with them - and the project itself was certainly not considered a mainstream Superhero story, in its time - nor was it marketed as such. Civil War, on the other hand, remains deeply entrenched within the marketing priorities of Marvel's line of Superhero publications. A trend pressed on by the parent corporate marketeers who show little of the vision such as a writer like Alan Moore seeks to realize with his work.

Tom Spurgeon continues to speak on the many facets of the corporate comics' delusional partiality. It might serve the big boys well to pay more heed to such dictum, if they'd truly aspire to become what they presently, in self-chicanery, allude to.