

“risk.” Chat with your enthusiastic comic readers to see how a series is progressing. Read reviews. Consult your friendly neighbourhood comic expert for advice.

Complaint #2: There’s too much violence! Comics glorify gore and war! There are weapons!
Response: It depends on “the who” and “the how.”

North American audiences seem to be bothered more by sex than by violence, but there are some graphic novels that do garner a lot of attention for their apparently excessive violence—ironically, it is some of these (*V for Vendetta*, *Sin City*, 300) that have been turned into movies. I would state that there are different kinds of violence. Violence against a monster is different from human on human violence, and is less objectionable in my eyes. Violence that matches the settings in which it occurs makes more sense than random scenes that serve no plot function. We expect that, in a pirate novel, a character would use a sword or, in a science fiction novel, a character might fire a laser gun. Some of the violence may occur off-screen “in the gutters” (a “gutter” is the term for the space between panels in a

comic). Finally, the comic production impacts the perception of violence—as my students have said “when it’s in black and white, it’s not so bad, because it’s hard to tell where the blood is.”

Beet The Vandel Buster is another guilty pleasure of mine. In this series, monsters called Vandels roam the world causing havoc. Beet is a young guy who idolizes a group of Vandel Busters called the Zenon Warriors and wishes to be a Buster like them. In volume 1, a powerful Vandel apparently destroys the team while they attempt to save Beet’s life—Beet ends up absorbing all the powers of their saiga (weapons). The storyline is all about how Beet gains allies and battles various beasts in his quest to rid the entire world of Vandels. As you might expect, the fight scenes are frequent. My adult graphic novel club had a very energetic discussion about the violence in this book. Personally, I did not find the violence as disturbing because they were monsters fighting humans. A few scenes of human suffering (e.g. in volume 1, Beet is nearly killed and in volume 10, a human is used by a Vandel as a living shield) emphasizes the cruelty of the Vandels. I would say that this series would be appropriate for

grade 5 and up, although my colleagues have suggested it would be better suited for grades 6 or 7 and up.

There’s something for everyone in the library, but not everything in the library is good for everybody. It all boils down to your professional, unbiased judgment, the needs of your patrons, the general response of your community when you are trying to determine how far to go, and what is (and what isn’t) acceptable or worthy. Just as we shouldn’t shy away from controversial novels, their graphic cousins should not be outlawed by the nail-biters and nay-sayers.

