

News

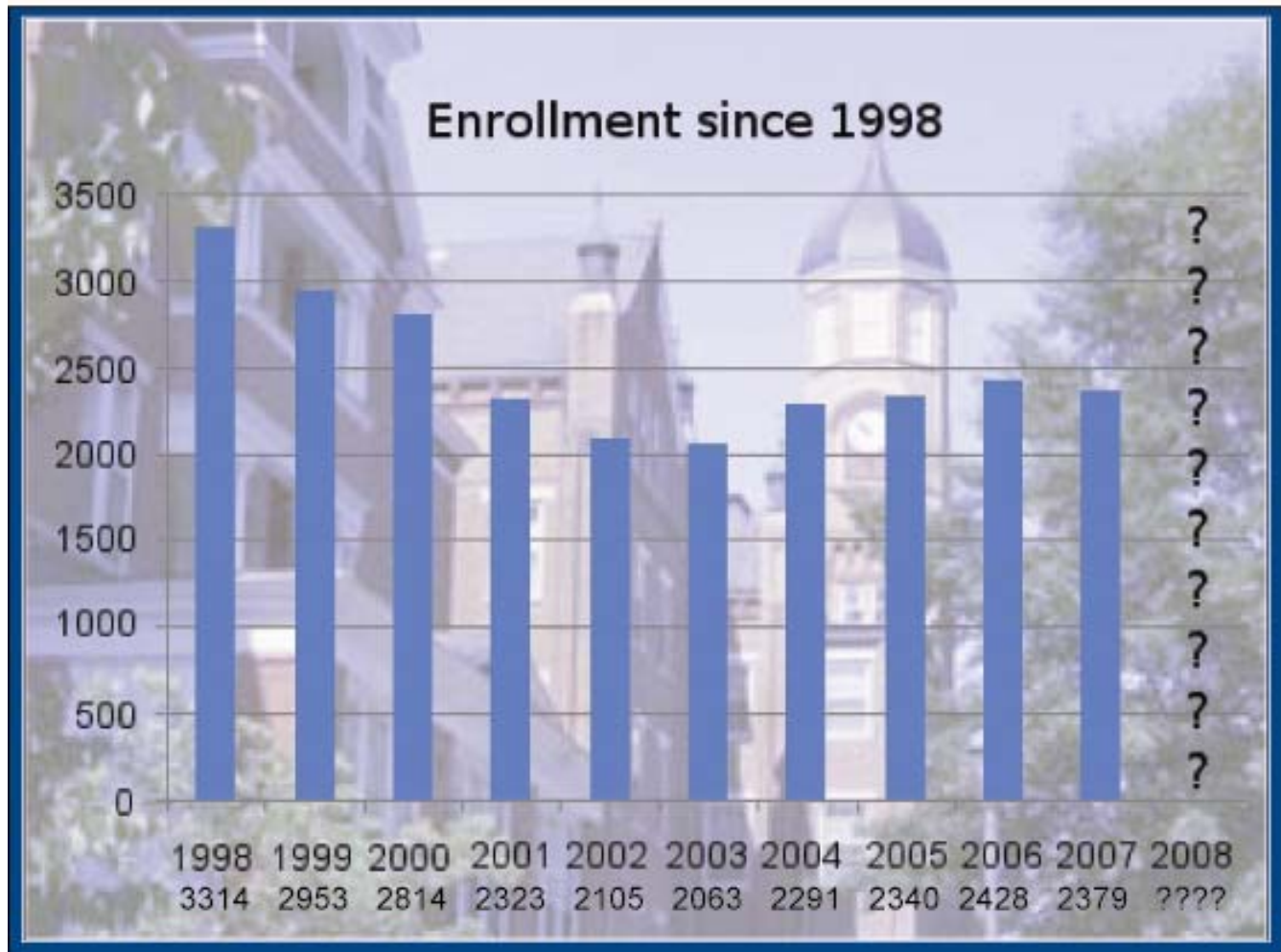
Main story:

W searches for new ways to lure students

By Sarah A. Wilson

Editor

Graph Credit: Kat Boatman



As the semester begins, it is clear that one issue looms largest for the W's administration: enrollment.

The W's latest enrollment figures are expected to be released by Friday. They will show whether student numbers have risen from the 2,379 enrolled in fall 2007.

"I'm not sure we're going to be up," said Dr. Claudia Limbert, president, in an interview Tuesday. "We may be a little bit down or we may be flat. I don't know that yet. It is right at that edge, and we are going to have to see what is going to happen."

Pressure to increase enrollment intensified after a state College Board decision to gradually cut \$4 million dollars from the W's budget. The cut represents a quarter of the state's annual allocation to the W.

"They're taking out a chunk each year. They've already taken a million out within the past three years. And what they are doing is redistributing that money to campuses that are growing. And we aren't growing at the rate that we need to grow," Limbert said.

The W projects that to offset the funding loss, enrollment must grow over the next six years to a total of at least 1,500 more students. That would mean a rise from the current 2,379 to almost 4,000.

"We're talking considerable numbers here – and a lot of those will be online students," Limbert said. Professors are being strongly encouraged to develop online courses a way of attracting more enrollees. Limbert

said that at this point no goal has been set for the number of online courses to be offered. "We're just getting our feet wet," Limbert said. "We're going to do more and more online because that's the way it's going. When you go online, you're competing with every college and university out there. We need to go ahead and get more courses out there."

Asked if the shift to more online offerings would diminish what has traditionally been cited as one of the W's attractions -- small classes where students can connect with the instructor and receive more personal attention -- Limbert said that the new option could actually offer more opportunity for interaction.

"What I have read suggests that when you have email contact, you become much more friendly and closer to the instructor than you might within the classroom, where you might be less likely to put up your hand and speak," she said. "So you are more apt to email your instructor, you're more apt to email some of your students -- get into a chat, than you would in the classroom."

To increase its enrollment, the W will not only have to attract more freshmen, but also keep them at the school beyond freshmen year. According to the latest figures available from the College Board, the W has the second-lowest retention rate among the state's four-year institutions.

Dr. Sandra Jordan, vice president of Academic Affairs, said that students tend to drop out when they are unable to pass the "gateway courses" of college algebra and freshman composition. Referring to national and local data on why students drop out, Jordan said other factors that can discourage students from persisting until graduation include weak preparation in high school or a schedule of more than 30 hours a week at a job off campus. To help struggling students stay in school, the W has launched a program called Turning Point. Piloted this summer, it offers an alternative to suspension.

"The concept of being suspended from college has been around for a long time," Jordan said. "In the '50s, 60s and 70s, if students did not persist in college, the main reason was that they were partying. They lacked the maturity to be in higher education. The model of sending students away from campus so they could mature and come back to campus and be successful was successful at that time. But in this century, maybe even beginning in the 90s, you have a less cohesive student body. Educational opportunities are open to a greater segment of the population of the United States.

You have a lot more diversity now. Sending them away to grow up is no longer what solves the problem. What Turning Point does is it recognizes that sending a student away from campus to mature isn't necessarily going to solve the issue if the issue is students who are not prepared for college."

Under the new program, a freshman whose GPA slips low enough to threaten probation or suspension would take a study skills class, limit the number of hours taken and meet

weekly with student support personnel who can coach them. Students must have at least a 1.5 GPA to qualify for Turning Point. "It gives them a better opportunity to achieve their academic goals and dreams if the problem is that they simply arrived here less prepared than they need to be," Jordan said.

The W has hired an additional member of the Student Services staff to help students in academic danger.

The chief obstacle in keeping enrollment healthy, said Limbert, is the W's gender-specific name. "Of course [the problem is] not just the name, but it is a very large part of it," Limbert said. "When we ask our students why they come here, they never say -- 'because the name is great.' What they say to me is that they come here because of the programs. They don't come here because of the name -- they come here in spite of it."

Limbert said that in keeping the current name, "We have hit a wall. And there is no amount of money or effort that we can put into it that will remove that. The perception that this is a women's college is not something that people want on their diplomas now. The name is getting in the way. That is not the only problem anywhere, but that is our main problem. We have been a co-ed school for 26 years."

A 30-member Naming Committee, including faculty, staff, students, alumni, and members of the community was appointed this week as the latest step toward giving the W a new identity.

Limbert said there is no timeline for the committee's to make its proposals. "I am not going to rush them. This is something we need to think about and be deliberate about. I haven't charged the committee yet, but what I think I am going to do is ask them for three names unranked and then hand that off to a smaller committee to give me the one they think is best. And they may want to run tests on some of the names."

She hasn't decided who will make up the smaller committee.

Ultimately, the Legislature will decide if the name will be changed.

Asked if the administration's two-year rift with its alumni has damaged recruitment efforts, Limbert said, "I

don't know. There comes a point where I am a business woman. I know that there is a lot of emotion in this and a lot of passion, but I have to move emotion aside and look at the data. I think that the alums love this university and they should support it at this time. We all love the university and I think we should all come together and support it."

What will happen if the W is unable to reach its recruitment goal by 2014? Limbert replied, "I'm an optimist. We will get it."

Coming Soon box to let readers know about the change:

Next week The Spectator will reach readers in a new way.

The primary method of delivery will be online, with weekly updates posted on Fridays. Once a month, the newspaper will issue a print supplement on Thursdays.

"The change makes sense academically because it reflects the Communication Department's emphasis on convergence in its curriculum," said department chair Dr. Martin Hatton.

In preparation for the shift, the Spectator's website is being redesigned to offer expanded content, including video, audio and comment feeds.

In many ways, this will be an experimental semester as we explore the new possibilities and work out the inevitable glitches. We welcome your comments but ask that you please be patient with us in this development phase. We also welcome applications from our fellow students to join us on the staff, particularly as we embark on this new path.

So next Friday, look for our latest edition on our new and improved web site:

www.muw.edu/spectator

Special Essay:

Ruminations on a new era at The Spectator

By Juna'uh Allgood

Managing editor



You are holding in your hands the last printed weekly issue of The Spectator.

A tradition, dear to the hearts of thousands of W alumni and current students, has come to an end.

The Spectator began in 1905 as a literary magazine published monthly. Eleven years later it became a weekly newspaper and has been one ever since. That's 92 years of a weekly print publication that brought news, political commentary, reviews, and opinions both positive and negative about the university, America, and the rest of the world.

In a move touted as convergence of the journalism of the school's past and the digital world that is an ever increasing part of the communications field, The Spectator will no longer be circulated every Thursday. Instead, the publication will go online each Friday. While The Spectator has published its paper content online for several years, now it will be published online without a print version accompanying it. The print version has not died, however; once a month a print issue will still land in our readers' hands.

This move does not reflect current trends on college campuses -- at least not yet. It seems we are on the cutting edge. The trend is for college newspapers to be in print with additional material peppered in online.

While students may prefer the print version, The Spectator's website can offer expansions to the printed form. Such as video, audio and comment feeds. Big news stories would not have to wait as long to reach readers, given the Web's faster delivery.

While such new capabilities will be designed to attract students and all interested readers to the site, we have numerous concerns about the shift.

One concern is that the newspaper was chosen as an early target in the latest round of budget cuts at the W. The move to online as the primary delivery method was not just an academic decision; the shift to printing just once a month was also a money-saving step. When the newspapers no longer appear around campus, The Spectator's impact is undeniably diminished. We lament that.

Another concern is whether we aspiring wordsmiths will be unwittingly contributing to a culture of one-click gratification and little substance.

How does reading online affect people? In Maryanne Wolf's book "Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain," the relationship between how people read online media versus how they read print media is examined. Wolf, a developmental psychologist at Tufts University, says that the internet puts efficiency and immediacy first. This is resulting in a disengagement from the text. The ability to interpret the text and make mental connections is lacking. Wolf says humans are becoming "decoders of information" and are losing the ability to comprehend what the information they decode actually means.

In its mission statement MUW says that its graduates are expected to have skills in communication, technology, and critical thinking. However, when its students are increasingly turned toward online reading, the critical thinking ability is at risk. Critical thinking requires the ability to make connections deeper than simply processing information on a screen.

Professors often bemoan students' lack of concentration. Will this be exacerbated as the tide turns toward the web? When students are increasingly turned to the web their minds become accustomed to the speed the net provides. Unfortunately, this speed comes with distractions as hyperlinks, blinking ads, and numerous windows to scatter the reader's focus.

Ray Bradbury's 'Fahrenheit 451', while a science-fiction piece set in the future, is a healthy warning. It is set in a time where an anti-intellectual America has banned books and newspapers. All the information is provided through technology and people caught reading anything in print are, at the least, committed to insane asylums. The book even addresses the specific demise of newspapers: "I remember the newspapers dying like huge moths. No one wanted them back. No one missed them."

While The Spectator has not been banned, the very fabric of its being has been altered. While a once-a-month printing will occur, it will largely be an online newspaper. More aptly put, it will be an online news organization, for paper will not be a large part of its being.

The paper form has provided some very important features that the online version will not be able to. Students will no longer pick up the paper every week and pass it among their friends. They will not be able to cut clippings of their activities and scrapbook them into pages to preserve as mementos. While laptops are portable, laptops do not easily fit at the cafeteria tables where students so often have pored over the week's news pages.

Still, there are some opportunities that the online version offers. One is a greatly increased accessibility. Family and friends of students can view The Spectator and glimpse the inner workings of the W. This is helpful because everyone who has spent time at the W knows it is a world unto itself. This ease in accessing

the Spectator provides a window to view the world of the W.

For us as students, this will be an opportunity to expand our repertoire of marketable skills. Like it or not, online is the wave of the future--although it's way too soon to write the obituary of the printed newspaper.

As the staff gets used to the shift, video footage will be placed alongside the text and can amplify the news and opinions. Instead of having to search for the facts the paper cites, the reader will be able to click on the text and follow the trail of news back to its origin. The archival system will also allow readers to easily track favorite stories from issues past.

In the end, The Spectator is not a moth to die out. This will be a challenging transition. We accept the challenge. The truth is that no matter what form it takes, print or online, and no matter how it is delivered--newsboy, the web, or even carrier pigeon -- The Spectator's spirit and commitment remain the same. We trust that the university's commitment to us will also endure.

Williams Tribute

Compiled by Celeste Finimore



The seventh annual Tennessee Williams Tribute will soon be under way.

Not only will MUW be a host to a number of free events and lectures here on campus, but there will also be a performance by the Emmy award winning actor Richard Thomas. Thomas is best known for his part as "John Boy" on *The Waltons*, but he has played many other roles on Broadway, regional theater, and had just finished a performance tour of "12 Angry Men." Thomas will be starring in "A Distant Country Called Youth" and "Blanche and Beyond" at Rent Auditorium on September 7. Though tickets will be required for both performances, there are many free events and activities for students and the public to attend.

"Friday Night at the Movies" is free and will be held at the Columbus-Lowndes Public Library at 7:30 on Sept. 6. The film to be shown is "Night of the Iguana" one of Tennessee Williams's famous plays. There will also be free lectures on campus Sept. 4-7. Two MUW professors will be speaking at lectures this year, Dr. Bridget Pieschel and Ms. Brooke Hanemann.

"Tennessee Williams was one of the most passionate, prolific, and bravest playwright of the American South. He changed the face of theater. The man who gave us some of the finest and most sought-after female roles of all time was born in Columbus, home of the nation's first public college for women. We should honor him," said Hanemann.

Tennessee Williams was born Thomas Lanier Williams in Columbus on March 26, 1911. His family was dysfunctional, with an overbearing mother, an abusive father, a distant brother, and a sister who would be institutionalized for the rest of her life. His family would prove to be inspiration for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and many other works. He would get most of his inspiration for his famous plays and works from watching the people around him. Tennessee Williams became an important part of American literature because he brought to light not only Mississippi life, and life in the South, but truths about human nature. *For a schedule of free events, see www.muw.edu/spectator.*

Opinion Column:

Another day, another issue

By Casey Parkman

Online editor



I think I view life too episodically. Why shouldn't, I though? I love serial storytelling in comics, TV shows, music to some extent, books, and movies with their endless sequels and remakes. The story just keeps on going. Changes occur, but not always as a means to the end. The adventure persists; life is one big "To Be Continued...."

Here is another of mine. I've been with The Spectator for two years now, last year being my term as editor-in-chief. Much more capable and talented leaders than I will be stepping in to take The Spectator to its next level. The story continues for this historic publication.

But everything is changing still, isn't it? It's fitting, it being the fall season when leaves change color and are shed from their perches to make room for new growth next year. Moving on is never easy. I'll still be around the paper office, but I'll be graduating soon and looking back. That story continues; so will mine.

As college students, we all stand with uncertainty threatening our sanity. We hope we can make a difference in this world, all the while learning just how to deal with new things, new ideas, new experiences. It's a chaotic time, just when you think you've arrived, it's time to start a new project and prove yourself. Your story continues on in your new careers, new friends, new family. Good luck to you all.

The Spectator will be going through changes as well. We'll only be publishing one issue a month from now on, with our focus going toward making our online home an important and necessary part of the MUW experience. Why the changes? See page 3. In the end, the "whys" won't matter, only the next step, the next change, the next issue of the story.

As for me, being editor has been one of the most educational and satisfying chapters of my life - educational in that I learned more about myself, and satisfying in that I accomplished something I never believed I could. For all my rebellious attitude and battles with individuals and institutions during my tenure here, the W has given me something important and memorable, and I have nothing but gratitude for it and all who took part. Thank you all.

As I said, my story continues. I still don't know what I'm waiting for, and my time is running wild. But it's another adventure, and I couldn't be more excited.



Lifestyles:

A trip into the land of make believe

By Josh Lee

Columnist



This weekend I am going to be dragged kicking and screaming into a horrible den of American escapism. That's right, several of the prestigious students of the W have invited me to come see them dress up as various characters from short works of fiction at Dragon-Con, a gathering to which I have never been, but which I understand is surely the inspiration behind all possible nightmares.

Dragon-Con is one of the biggest gatherings of speculative fiction authors and fans in the South – there will be movie previews, game play-testing, and panels on writing. However, beyond that, there will be thousands of people indulging their longing to get away from this world by dressing up like aliens and imaginary do-gooders.

Of course, in between the long nights of holding my head and gibbering at the sheer, abject terror that this trip is sure to inspire, I have begun to wonder about the hold that escapism has on so many of us. You don't have to look long on campus before you see the tell-tale signs of the escapist – they lurk in the heart of the literati, they dwell within the breast of those who watch television, and the sigh of every woman who just loves Mr. Darcy and wishes he were real and existed in triplicate.

If you talk to anyone about what they like to read, you are almost assured to get at least one response that could be classified as pulp – a book that a person likes, not because of any educational or life-enriching value, but because the setting is fun, or the plot is interesting, or you want to know exactly who murdered Ms. Plum in the library with the coffee-mug. Things like this aren't substantial attempts to get away from reality, so in that sense, I don't even think that counts as escapism.

Escapism must be when dissatisfaction drives a person further and further away from that core part of them that says, "The real world matters, and so does what society thinks of you." As their ability to be satisfied by normal day-to-day life starts to wear down, the escapist flings themselves at even more fanciful and flighty ways to remove their respectability. What begins as an excessive interest in Doc Savage and his merry band of 'people who happened to have graduated from a trade school' soon erupts into a full transformation of the person's life. High-gloss posters of Edward Cullen begin to adorn their walls instead of the classical works of art which bring joy to so many. They begin to discuss episodes of television shows by name and production number instead of by general descriptions. They begin to eat chocolate covered biscuit sticks for the sole reason that they are imported from another country. Once the madness reaches its apex, they gather in large groups – they call the occasions conventions, but I think they could be more honestly described as celebrations of indulgence and bourgeois idealism – and actually clad themselves in the raiments of other, fictional worlds that they think are exciting and new.

Think about the danger this group represents. One day you, the reader, could be gently sipping coffee and thinking about important things like your nine-to-five job or what you will have for dinner. Then, out of the corner of your eye, you see some horrendous abomination, such as a supposedly mature adult dressed up like Harry Potter. These sights are becoming more and more common as time goes on, with new and more miasmal forms of these conventions popping into existence every day. Even the smallest towns are not immune.

The only way to stem this flowing tide is to help each other realize that, in fact, every-day things are pretty amazing. The only reason that the normal parts of our lives don't seem as exciting is because we become jaded with the world around us as we live in it. Every day, most people reading this paper will see a toaster, and think nothing of it – but a toaster is an awe-inspiring appliance. It's straight out of the works of fiction – hundreds of years ago, who would have imagined that we would have a box that can cook food just by pressing a button? It's a work of genius and wonderful, but to most of us it's just another part of our lives. In a world with horseless carriages and wireless communication, how can we not live in awe of the things that surround us?

Movie Review:

Geeks save the summer

By Casey Parkman

Online editor



For a comic geek like me, this past summer has been like a miraculous victory. “Iron Man,” “Incredible Hulk,” “Wanted,” “Hellboy II: The Golden Army,” “Hancock” and, of course, the behemoth “The Dark Knight”; all dominated at the box office (some more prominently than others) and all left an impression on the Hollywood landscape.

“Blade” was the beginning. It debuted in 1998, as the first major Marvel Comics big budget movie. It begat “X-Men” in 2000, which begat “Spider-Man” in 2002. And the ball kept rolling. Comic books held 10 years of box office supremacy - even garnering critical acclaim along the way and allowing smaller comic book properties like “Ghost World,” “A History of Violence,” and “American Splendor” to be made and catch an indie cred that's become so important.

This summer could be the apex I'm afraid, but what a way to begin the crash. I realize Marvel and DC both announced a slate of movies to appear over the next five years, but how can you top the acclaim and money “The Dark Knight” garnered?



“Iron Man” set the tone when it busted all expectations. The mainstream saw “Iron Man” as a B-level

super-hero, but comic fans knew otherwise. Director Jon Favreau, lead Robert Downey, Jr., and supporting cast members Terrance Howard and Gwyneth Paltrow knocked it out of the park. They seemed like they were having fun and like they actually cared about the characters and the movie.

“Incredible Hulk” was not the success Marvel wanted. It was no. 1 at the box office and got a little more than Ang Lee’s highly underrated “Hulk” film from 2003, but they were hoping to do better and continue their roll from “Iron Man.” Marvel is connecting their movie properties now in one solid universe, as they do with the comics. Downey has an important and unpublicized cameo at the end of “Incredible Hulk” that will most likely help DVD sales as further Marvel movies come out.

“Wanted” was a big surprise for Hollywood. This comic property was a small six-issue series about a world dominated by a fraternity of super-villains. Budget concerns changed the super-villains to assassins, and the movie became a sexy, over-the-top thriller. Big names like Angelina Jolie and Morgan Freeman, as well as rising star James McAvoy, helped the box office for sure, but the wild previews and unexpected special effects also had a hand. The last line in the film is, I believe, the best of the summer, and a big middle finger to the audience. I loved it.

“Hellboy II” dropped the Lovecraftian trappings from the first movie (and from the comic) and turned in a fantasy take on the character. Fresh from his award winning “Hellboy II” was a beautiful creation, taking time to explore its bizarre world and appreciating the artistry of its effects. “Pan’s Labyrinth,” director Guillermo Del Toro is becoming quite a powerhouse in Hollywood. His next film is “The Hobbit” with Peter Jackson.

Will Smith’s “Hancock” proved that Hollywood could finally deliver an original super-hero and make it a hit. (I’m happily forgetting “My Super Ex-Girlfriend” and “Zoom.”) “Hancock” finally answered the question: What if Superman were a drunken idiot? Well, he’d cause lots of property damage, numerous injuries, and be hated across the world. And Hancock fits all of that. Smith does a good job of being unlikable, and the movie was a lot of fun.

But the juggernaut, the monster, the supersaurus of the summer was clearly “The Dark Knight.” In two short months, this movie has shot to the top to become the second biggest movie of all time, breaking every possible record in between. It’s coming up on the \$500 million mark (still short of the roughly \$600 million Titanic pulled in, unfortunately), but it has won consistent acclaim and is being considered for numerous Oscars. Some people attribute this to Heath Ledger’s astonishing role as the Joker, some point to Ledger’s death, some point to its being a super-hero movie. Whatever the case, I believe everything came together at the right time and place for this movie. It crushed the benchmark “Iron Man” set at the beginning of the summer and showed the world what super-heroes can do.

Want more proof? The “Watchmen” trailer at the beginning of the movie was based on the greatest super-hero comic series no one has ever heard, and caused sales for the “Watchmen” trade paperback to shoot up the charts, immediately making it the biggest selling comic book trade of all time. And that’s a book that first came out over 20 years ago.

Many more super-hero movies are yet to be made, and will undoubtedly be great and make lots of money. I just don’t believe any summer of movies could be any bigger than this past one for super-heroes. I’ve loved every minute of it, reveling and geekily giggling to myself. We geeks truly do run the world.