

Superheroes -- Sidekicks

Ultimate Spiderman: Power and Responsibility

ISBN: 078510786X

By Brian Michael Bendis and Bill Jemas

Art by Mark Bagley

Marvel Books 2001

Age Level: 9 and up

What would you do if you could suddenly wallop the bullies who tease you? If you could literally climb the walls? Come on, I bet even the best of us would be up the side of a building in about two seconds flat dropping water balloons. Peter Parker learns the hard way that superpowers provide many temptations and that in order to be a true hero, he has to temper his abilities with a careful mind and a heart.

review by [Robin](#)

[Back to the top](#)

Ultimate Spiderman: Learning Curve

ISBN: 0785108203

by Brian Michael Bendis

Art by Mark Bagley and Art Thibert

Marvel Books 2001

Age Level: 9 and up

Still struggling with his powers and secret identity, not to mention recovering from the death of his uncle, teenage Peter Parker is still trying to convince the world that Spiderman is not a crackpot vigilante. He lands a job at the city paper and works toward proving his good intentions by attempting to take down the city's largest menace, both literally and figuratively, Kingpin. Peter soon learns, however, that no matter how much might his new powers have given him, his wits are what will save him in the end. Now, if he could only figure out Mary Jane, life might be close to perfect. The Ultimate Spiderman team continues to update the Spiderman myth with the best in witty repartee, exuberant action, and teenage emotional rollercoasters.

review by [Robin](#)

[Back to the top](#)

Ultimate Spiderman: Double Trouble

ISBN: 0785108793

by Brian Michael Bendis

Art by Mark Bagley and Art Thibert

Marvel Books 2002

Age Level: 9 and up

Peter Parker just can't win. The city's now convinced that Spiderman is a wacko in PJs despite Peter's many miraculous saves. On top of convincing the world that his alter-ego is a white hat, Peter is also inching forward in his relationship with Mary Jane, only to have an entrancing new girl throw a wrench in the works. Then Dr. Otto Octavius, whose massive metal arms, once his surgical tools, have been melded to his ribcage in freak accident, breaks out of his holding cell. Intent on destroying the men responsible for his condition, Dr. Octavius goes on a rampage, and Spiderman does his best to run to the rescue. Facing mysterious men in black, a reality TV hunter determined to catch Spiderman on live TV, and the ever more confusing signals of teenage girls, Peter fights to win back his good name both in the spotlight and at home. The quips just get better and better (this volume had me cheerily giggling on the bus) - when Spiderman can insult his foe's hairdo with flair, you know you're in the hands of a great writer. The artwork remains it's fine, brilliant best. All I can say is more!

review by [Robin](#)

[Back to the top](#)

X-Men: Evolution

ISBN: 0785109404

by Devin Grayson

Art by Udon, Long Vo, and Charles Park

Marvel 2003

Age Level: 9 and up

One of the most fun by far of the recent X-Men spin offs is the recent cartoon **X-Men: Evolution**, exploring on the teenhood of many of our favorite X-Men under the care of Professor Xavier. The cartoon has gained a large audience of both kids and adults alike -- deservedly so, given its smart dialog, streamlined animation, and true-to-character storylines and issues. This graphic novel takes one step further back from the cartoon and shows us the origin of the show's arrangements, tracing Xavier's discovery of all of the mutants we've come to know and love on the show. The artwork, though certainly in the style of the cartoon, has more detail and shading and works well. The story, though not terribly deep, gives a welcome background to the show's set-up.

review by [Robin](#)

[Back to the top](#)

Invincible: Family Matters

ISBN: 1582403201

by Robert Kirkman

Art by Cory Walker and Bill Crabtree

Image Comics 2003

Age Level: 9 and up

In this era of violent superhero tales, in which we're led to question the nature and heroics of superheroes themselves, I every once in a while long for a story where the good guys are good (though still human) and the heroism is clear, without mixed motives or shady dealings. **Invincible** is just such a breath of fresh air.

Not a terribly new idea -- the son of a superhero begins learning his own powers and place in the world -- the whole book is nonetheless wonderfully refreshing. It answers some of those long-standing questions about the pedestrian aspect of superheros. What do you do when you return from an alternate dimesion where time flowed faster? You go have a shower and shave. Where do all those vibrant, skin-tight costumes come from? Why, the same tailor, naturally. How do teams form up? Well, you just go out there, do your superhero thing, and hope you meet up with a compatible group who just might give you a chance. Mark Grayson, the teenage son of one of the most powerful superheroes on the planet, has been waiting all his life for his inherited superpowers to kick in, and when they do, he's right on board with the whole deal. There are some charming, light moments throughout the book, from Mark's first flight with his dad to conversations with a certain pretty member of Mark's new team, but the awareness of danger and consequence within the heroes' roles keeps the book from being fluff or saccharine. Cory Walker and Bill Crabtree's work on the art is equally lovely and uncluttered, filled with eloquent expressions and light, energetic tones. This title is great for almost all ages, and might make a nice addition to graphic novel collections for kids who are thirsting for superhero stories and who aren't quite ready for [Dark Knight Returns](#). Don't let that keep you from getting it for teens, or adults, though -- it's all around good stuff.

review by [Robin](#)

[Back to top](#)

Superman for All Seasons

ISBN: 0970355505

by Jeph Loeb

Art by Tim Sale, Bjarne Hansen, Richard Starkings

DC Comics 1999

Age Level: 9 and up

I must admit I was never drawn to Superman all that much -- too noble, too good, no shades of grey. This title, though, by comics guru Jeph Loeb, is wonderful. It is also, I discovered, a really good place to start in terms of learning a bit more about the Man of Steel's background and personality. With spare dialogue that never jars or feels too full of convenient, folksy platitudes, Jeph Loeb has created a subtle and complex portrait of Clark Kent, Superman, Lois Lane, and Lex Luthor. For each season, we get a different narrator in Clark's life, and thus a different point of view on the man. The artwork by Tim Sale veers away from the flashy primary colors so associated with superheroes and instead evokes the story through graded watercolors and flowing lines. All together, this title is not a careening action tale, but instead a kind of meditation on the man, the myth, and the definition of a hero.

review by [Robin](#)

[Back to the top](#)

Magic Pickle

ISBN: 1929998333

by Scott Morse

Oni Press 2002

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ISBN: 1929998333

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Oni Press 2002

Age Level: 7 and up

Children's fantasy is full of talking creatures: animals, insects, even trees! So isn't it time vegetables had their say? In **Magic Pickle**, Scott Morse reveals a shocking secret: a bunch of produce has, er, gone bad and is planning to terrorize the nation. Luckily, we have a hero on our side. Code-named "Weapon Koshier," the Magic Pickle was created by Doctor Jekyll Formaldehyde to protect mankind from "villainous vegetables" like the Phantom Carrot, the Romaine Gladiator, and the fiery Chili Chili Bang Bang. Things get complicated when our hero (who's been in a jar for fifty years) discovers that his secret lab is located beneath Jo Jo Wigman's bedroom floor. Can a girl help an experienced super-pickle in his mission, even if she does still wear footsie jammies? Morse draws vegetables and humans with personality and style; if you can't imagine a pickle scowling, this book will change your mind. Hilarious artwork, plucky kids, and silly puns make **Magic Pickle** perfect for younger comics readers.

review by [Jen](#)

[Back to the top](#)

Sidekicks: The Transfer Student

ISBN: 1929998406

by J. Torres

Art by Takeshi Miyazawa

Oni Press 2002

Age Level: 9 and up

Did you want to run away to Professor Xavier's school when you saw X-Men? Yeah, I did too. Reading **Sidekicks** might help to tide you over 'til you develop your own superpowers. Terry Highland's dad was once a superhero sidekick, and Terry has powers of her own. So how do kids with super-powers learn to use them? By enrolling in Shuster Academy, a state-of-the-art high school that trains future heroes. Life at Shuster isn't all costumes and kicking butt, though; use your powers between classes and you'll have to deal with the strict Ms. Sternin. As Terry adjusts to her new environment, she has to deal with exams, demerits, and cliques like any other high school student. Her greatest challenge, however, will be overcoming her own fears; although Terry's power is super-strength, she can't face returning to the virtual reality fight-training room where an accident threatened her life. J. Torres, who also writes [Alison Dare](#), knows exactly what high school is like, and Takeshi Miyazawa draws teens who really look like teens! The only problem with **Sidekicks** is that it left me wanting to know what happens next, so here's hoping there's another