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Dare to know

Noir Comics

Comics about crime and detection that feature violence and treachery and a lack of distinction between criminals and heroes.

A sub-genre in which the tone is a grim appraisal of the human condition (*noir* is the French word for black). Noir comics feature gritty urban settings such as New York City, Los Angeles, or San Francisco. The central distinction lies in noir's morally questionable protagonists, darker mysteries, and bleak and nihilistic outlook. Hard-boiled detectives may bend or break the law to solve the case, but their morally centered pursuit of justice ends with a reasonably clear conscience. In noir, the protagonists are driven by base desires—greed, lust, jealousy, or alienation—that entangle them in a web from which there is no escape. They are not required to be detectives, although crime is the preferred subject. Especially, one that leads to the downfall of the protagonists or other sympathetic characters. Crime fiction editor Otto Penzler succinctly commented, “noir is about losers.” A staple of the sub-genre is the femme fatale, a mysterious and seductive woman who uses her sex appeal to entice and entrap those who stand in the way of her goal.

Common Elements

Institutional corruption
Action
Intrigue
Flawed and complex characters
Femme fatale
General pessimism

Moral ambiguity
Human despair
Self-destructive behavior
Desperation
Futility

Graphic Novel Examples

<i>100 Bullets Omnibus Volume 1</i> (2021) by Brian Azzarello and Eduardo Risso
<i>Bad Luck Chuck</i> (2019) by Lela Gwenn and Matthew Dow Smith
<i>Blacksad: The Collected Stories</i> (2020) by Juan Díaz Canales and Juanjo Guarnido
<i>Cruel Summer</i> (2020) by Ed Brubaker and Sean Phillips
<i>Dead Eyes Volume 1</i> (2020) by Gerry Duggan and John McCrea
<i>The Fade Out</i> (2018) by Ed Brubaker and Sean Phillips

<i>The Files of Ms. Tree</i> (1984) by Max Allan Collins and Terry Beatty
<i>Goldfish</i> (2022) by Brian Michael Bendis
<i>Gotham City, Year One</i> (2023) by Tom King and Phil Hester
<i>Gun Honey Volume 1</i> (2022) by Charles Ardai and Ang Hor Kheng
<i>Happy!</i> (2017) by Grant Morrison and Darick Robertson
<i>A History of Violence</i> (1997) by John Wagner and Vince Locke

<i>The Human Target Volume 1</i> (2022) by Tom King and Greg Smallwood	<i>Sin City: The Hard Goodbye</i> (1992) by Frank Miller
<i>Jinx</i> (2022) by Brian Michael Bendis	<i>Son of the Gun</i> (2014) by Alejandro Jodorowsky and Georges Bess
<i>Last of the Independents</i> (2020) by Matt Fraction and Kieron Dwyer	<i>Triggerman</i> (2017) by Walter Hill, Matz, and Jef
<i>Over My Dead Body: A Near Death Thriller</i> (2020) by Jay Faerber and Simone Guglielmini	<i>X Men Noir</i> (2009) by Fred Van Lente and Dennis Calero
<i>Reckless</i> (2020) by Ed Brubaker and Sean Phillips	