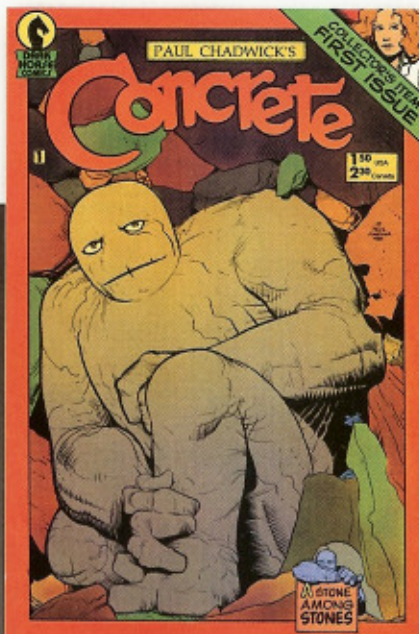


# Comics 101

**This month Portland State University and Dark Horse Comics open the country's first comic book archive.**

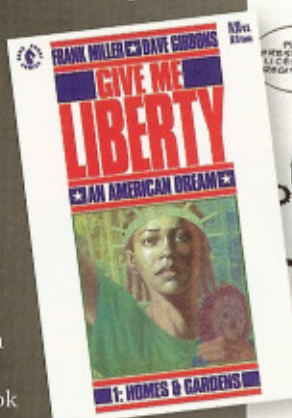
THE HALLOWED HALLS of Portland State University's Branford P. Millar Library house some very valuable holdings—the Middle East Studies collection, for example. But the library recently accepted a collection considered by most academics to be far less, well, academic. Milwaukee's Dark Horse Comics has so far donated over 3,000 volumes to the library's shelves (that's three copies of every title the company has ever produced), making PSU the first university in the country to keep such an archive. "This is an important international research collection," says librarian Helen H. Spalding. "It holds an interest for those studying American pop culture, gender studies, violence in literature—almost anything." Dark Horse, which PSU alumni Mike Richardson and Neil Hankerson started in 1986, is the third-largest comic-book publisher in the country after powerhouses Marvel (*X-Men*, *Spider-Man*) and DC (*Superman*, *Batman*), and its titles have provided the inspiration for such Hollywood hits as *Hellboy* and *Alien vs. Predator*. "We wanted to make the university a hub of comic-book studies," says Richardson. It seems to be working: The comics have already proved popular checkout items—even patrons at other city and university libraries are requesting them through Interlibrary Loan. If you're stuck on the waiting list, you can peruse the comics inside the library instead. Here we offer a sneak peek at just what you can expect to find.

—Kristen Hall-Geisler



**THE CONCRETE SERIES**, by Paul Chadwick

This comic, about a congressional speech-writer who morphs into a one-ton concrete creature, debuted in Dark Horse's inaugural year. "I expected it to sell 10,000 copies," says Richardson. "It sold 50,000." The creator received several awards for *Concrete* in the late 1980s, including multiple Eisner Awards for Best Continuing Series and Best New Series.



**HARD BOILED and GIVE ME LIBERTY**, by Frank Miller

In 1990, writer Frank Miller, of *Sin City* and *300* fame, and artists Dave Gibbons and Geof Darrow broke ranks with Marvel and DC. The trio then created *Hard Boiled*, about a homicidal cyborg tax collector, and *Give Me Liberty*, which features a war hero named Martha Washington from Chicago's Cabrini-Green housing projects. Unlike other publishers, Richardson gave the creators ownership of their characters—if Miller wanted to take Martha back to Marvel, he could. This approach brought an influx of writers and artists to Dark Horse, including *Hellboy* writer and artist Mike Mignola, who began inking the series in 1993. Eleven years later, the movie grossed \$23 million in its opening weekend.



**THE ALIENS SERIES**

Before Dark Horse's publication of *Aliens* in 1988, comic-book adaptations of movies were usually low-budget rehashes of the filmed originals. But Dark Horse hired well-known writers and artists—like Marvel's longtime *Uncanny X-Men* writer Chris Claremont—to continue the sci-fi series, basically "making movie sequels in print," says Richardson. That led to *Aliens vs. Predator*, which became a movie more than a decade after the comic book came out.