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## Comics ablaze during summer

### Humans in second place, turmoil for superheroes

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It's been quite a summer for comic books, with two of the largest publishers in the US — Marvel Comics and DC Comics — dominating the market with their respective summer "event" stories.

Marvel's "event" is *House Of M*, the story of a radically altered reality. In this reality, a mutant has mucked with everything that is, and turned the "Marvel Universe" upside-down. Mutants became Earth's ruling class, overseen by the regime of Magneto, "the House of M." Thus, humans are no longer the dominate species but stuck living among the many super-powered mutants.

This story is contained in an eight-issue mini-series; however, to expand on the new world that was created, numerous other Marvel titles have been touched by the "House of M" story. Several are mini-series themselves: *Fantastic Four*, *Spider-Man* and *Iron Man*. There are also a number of direct cross-overs with regular titles. All told, there are about 50 issues if one wants to read the entire expanded saga; however, one need only read the 8-issue mini-series *House Of M* in order to have the core, primary story.

At the other end of the yard, DC Comics is revving its engine, ready to launch onto the track in October. Over the course of the summer, DC has been publishing four six-issue mini-series, each chronicling events that are

radically altering aspects of the DC continuity: magic, alien politics, organized villains and humans asserting their independence from so-called "super-heroes."

These four mini-series will conclude in September, leading into the main event: *Infinite Crisis*. *Infinite Crisis* is expected to radically alter the status quo for the majority of the DC characters. (In this way, while it is not a direct follow-up to 1985's *Crisis On Infinite Earths*, this new series will set the foundation of the DC Comics continuity for years to come).

One particular change already being put into effect is the deteriorating relationship between the company's three main characters — Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman. Traditionally the three have had a working professional relationship at the least, but as this story builds up, irreconcilable differences have emerged between the three.

Returning to times past, Marvel has revived its Annuals program, this time for their ultimate line. *Ultimate Spider-Man*, *Ultimate X-Men* and *The Ultimates* have all received an annual in the last several weeks, with the fourth — *Ultimate Fantastic Four* — receiving an annual Sept. 21 (subject to shipping delays).

DC, meanwhile, has followed Marvel in producing a new line of comics starring contemporary versions of older characters, beginning with *All-star Batman and Robin*, *The Boy Wonder*. This series launched in July, and pairs up writer Frank Miller (*Sin City*, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*) with artist Jim Lee (*Batman: Hush*, *Superman: For Tomorrow*.) The book ships on a six-week schedule with the second issue due out Sept. 14. The second All-star series will be *All-star Superman*, due out in November, pairing writer Grant Morrison (*New X-Men*, *We3*, *Seven Soldiers*) with artist Frank Quietly (*The Authority*.)

Both publishers have extensive backlists of collected volumes for their series, with many of these found at larger book chains in addition to comic specialty stores. They allow for one to catch up on current events rather easily (the first collected volume for a *House Of M* tie-in, *Excalibur*, has been out for several weeks), and while Marvel traditionally puts out the collected volume within a couple months of the original issues, DC is pursuing a similarly aggressive schedule for its four *Countdown* mini-series, with the collected volumes scheduled for November release.

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