

Be Bold, Be Bold – The Lair

Preacher: Gone to Texas

ISBN: 1563892618

By Garth Ennis

Art by Steve Dillon

DC Comics (Vertigo), 1996

Ah, **Preacher**. It's a comic to make the censors' heads explode: profanity (heaps), violence (extra-gory), sex (various flavors), blasphemy (but of course!), and other sins too numerous to mention. As its many fans will attest, **Preacher** also features intelligent writing, deft characterization, and an intriguing view of Heaven and Hell. The series works because its human characters have an essential sweetness; despite appearances, they all want to do the right thing. The Preacher in question is Jesse Custer, a minister whose faith has been eroded by the petty evil of his flock. His companions on the journey he's about to begin are Tulip, an ex-girlfriend with a dark past, and Cassidy, a foul-mouthed Irishman with a mysterious aversion to sunlight. Jesse and his unlikely allies are on a mission to find God, who left Heaven on a trip a while back and never returned. How does Jesse know this? He's just had his belief in a higher power restored in a dramatic way. While God's AWOL, bickering factions in Heaven have allowed an awesomely powerful being escape. Genesis, the child of forbidden love between an angel and a demon, wants to bond with a human soul. Guess who it chose? Now Jesse's got various forces of Heaven, Hell, and Earth chasing him. If Jesse ever finds God, God will have some explaining to do...

Gone to Texas introduces a host of interesting characters and subplots. I'm looking forward to reading further volumes; while the first book got my attention, it didn't have time to develop all its intriguing ideas to their full potential. Like [Transmetropolitan](#), **Preacher** pushes the boundaries of comics. Both titles appeal to teens and adults, and both will raise eyebrows.

review by [jen](#)

[back to top](#)

Sandman

by Neil Gaiman

DC Comics 1987-1996

Yes, finally, at long last, we have reviewed the illustrious **Sandman** series (which also means I finally read it, and good God, why did I wait so long?). So, click here my friends to see the whole series, volumes one to ten, as well as the most recent installment, Endless Nights. If you like, you can skip to individual volumes:

[Sandman: Preludes and Nocturnes \(I\)](#)

[Sandman: The Doll's House \(II\)](#)

[Sandman: Dream Country \(III\)](#)

[Sandman: Season of Mists \(IV\)](#)

[Sandman: A Game of You \(V\)](#)

[Sandman: Fables and Reflections \(VI\)](#)

[Sandman: Brief Lives \(VII\)](#)

[Sandman: World's End \(VIII\)](#)

[Sandman: The Kindly Ones \(IX\)](#)

[Sandman: The Wake \(X\)](#)

[Sandman: Endless Nights \(XI\)](#)

reviews by [petra](#)

[back to top](#)

The First: Two Houses Divided

ISBN: 1931484147

by Barbara Kesel

Art by Bart Sears, Andy Smith, Micahel Atiyeh, Dave Lanphear, Andrea Di Vito, Lary Stucker, and Paul Mounts

CrossGen 2001

Somehow, a god in gleaming skintight gold pants and massive white go-go boots does not necessarily inspire fear or reverence in me. For a long while, I steered clear of *The First*, as a series, as it took me quite a while to get past the style -- here were characters who were almost ridiculous caricatures of humans, with massive muscles, teeny waists, and costumes that give even Elektra's costume a run for its money in the body-parts-about-to-pop-out department. This was the kind of comic that made me rant about the representation of women in comics (though, I was forced to admit, the men were equally, ahem, displayed in *The First*). Then I read it. And poof, my objections began to melt away. Remember the Greek Gods? They were an arrogant, selfish, petty lot, and thus we have some great stories of betrayal, love, war, and magic. *The First* follow in that tradition, being the powers hovering just above the CrossGen universe, immortal and ridiculously beautiful exaggerations of humans, and as with Zeus et. al., petty, vindictive, territorial, and passionate. Suddenly, the wacked out costumes and elaborate anatomy made sense, and the story -- well, the story is one to rival the myths. Though the First have long accepted manipulation of the lower peoples as their right as gods, they have just discovered that not only may they not be as all-powerful, or alone, as they believe, but they can also be killed. Long ago divided into two halves by a cruel but powerful leader, the two houses of the First struggle with their own loyalties and politics in order to reestablish their rightful place in universe. Sides are beginning to form, and some take this newfound weakness as a sign to start breaking down long-held rules. Although occasionally difficult to follow in terms of who's on what side, the complexity and high drama of this tale make it a whole lot of fun. And hey, there's a god in go-go boots. Hee.

review by [robin](#)

[back to top](#)

The First: Magnificent Tension

ISBN: 1931484171

by Barbara Kesel

Art by Bart Sears, Andy Smith, Michael Atiyeh (and others...)

CrossGen Comics, 2002

I love **The First**! You may recall from her review of **The First: Two Houses Divided** that Robin has reservations about *The First*'s, ahem, idealistic take on anatomy. In other words, the characters have muscles and breasts out the wazoo. Somehow, this never bothered me. The gods and goddesses known as the First look like superheroes crossed with soap-opera characters on steroids. For them, unnatural beauty is a fact of life. Fortunately, they've also been endowed with humor, pathos, and, yes, humanity by the

incomparable writing of Barbara Kesel.

The First: Magnificent Tension continues the deliciously complex plot begun in **Two Houses Divided**. Ingra, the tempestuous leader of House Sinister, is marshalling support for her plan to take over House Dexter. Meanwhile, her daughter Persha struggles to re-unite the two houses. House Dexter has its own troubles in the form of Seahn; the young god grows ever more ruthless, even seeking an alliance with Ingra as he plots to overthrow House Dexter's older generation of leaders. The fate of the First lies with those who straddle the divide between the houses: Persha, whose desire for unity brings her closer to the ideals of House Dexter; Seahn, whose lust for power leads him to House Sinister. To further complicate matters, each young rebel has an advisor with a hidden agenda.

I haven't even mentioned the third and most fascinating thread of this intricate plot: that of Gannish and his lonely search for answers to the mysteries of his universe. There's so much going on in this book! If you're a fan of the CrossGen universe, read **Magnificent Tension** right away; you'll find tantalizing clues to the larger forces at work. If you're just entering this marvelous world, don't worry; **The First** is a series well worth reading on its own. Librarians: recommend this to your fantasy fans and anyone who loves a good court intrigue.

review by [Jen](#)

[back to top](#)

The First: Sinister Motives

ISBN: 1931484392

by Barbara Kesel

Art by art by Andrea DiVito, Rob Hunter, Rob Schwager

CrossGen Comics 2003

In an interview at the back of **Sinister Motives**, Barbara Kesel describes the CrossGen universe as a Buckminster Sphere: "a round shape built of interlocking triangles." The individual titles (**The First**, **Meridian**, **Scion**, **Sojourn**, **Mystic**, and many others) are points on the sphere where readers access the stories, but each story is connected to the others to form one marvelously complex world. Of all the CrossGen titles, **The First** seems to intersect most with the other tales. Since the First consider themselves the gods of the universe, they're prone to popping up in other stories whenever they feel like it. Little by little, forces from those other worlds are beginning to affect their own. Each volume of the series reveals another hint of powers older and better than the First, and with each new hint it becomes clear that The First may hold the key to all the mysteries of the CrossGen universe. Readers may find themselves rushing off to consult other series in the hopes of guessing what CrossGen has in store.

If you're reading The First on its own, you'll still find plenty to chew on in Sinister Motives. The arrogant Seahn brings the conflict in House Dexter to a head, challenging Pyrem for its leadership. As the battle shifts to House Sinister, Seahn's true nature is revealed. Meanwhile, Persha finds the object of her quest (who's hiding out in another story!) and a lot more questions for her trouble. If Altwal won't help her, can she reunite the two houses herself? Guided by the mysterious Enson and Wytur, Seahn and Persha both have the potential to revolutionize the First. Whose vision will succeed? And what will happen when the two instigators meet? The questions raised in Sinister Motives will leave readers itching for the next volume. Kesel has created a web of characters and subplots intricate enough to challenge the cleverest fantasy fans.

review by [Jen](#)

[back to top](#)

Sparks: An Urban Fairytale

ISBN: 0943151627

by Lawrence Marvit

Slave Labor Graphics 2002

This may be a story you think you've heard before: a princess, a knight, magic, and perils overcome by true love. You'd be wrong. In this version, the princess is a car mechanic, the knight a sweet and melancholy mechanical product of her loneliness, and the perils are the far more common dangers of prejudice, violence, low self-esteem, and the cruelty of expectations, both the world's and the ones we put on ourselves. Jo, our princess, is a stick of a girl with little more than genius mechanical know-how and a sweet nature to get her through the world. Sometimes that's enough, especially on the night she creates, with a Frankensteinian addition of lightning, a metal knight built entirely from spare car parts. Most of the time, though, the glares of "real" girls Jo desperately wants to be, the bellowing of a drunken father, the silence of valium-addled of a mother, and the stream of disappointments in her social life affect Jo more than she'd like to admit. Her one source of comfort is the unlikely knight: he learns to speak through flashcards, dubs himself Galahad, and carries Jo across the night rooftops far away from her troubles. In teaching Galahad about the world, Jo begins to see a way out of her life, as well as the problems she must face before she can be what she dreams. The artwork in this tale is fluid and simple -- utterly perfect for the story presented. Too much detail might have made Galahad unbelievable, but the calligraphic lines of Marvit's work make every line a soulful look or a shimmer of movement. Love, loss, and a wandering path to independence weave through Sparks -- it is not a tale I will soon forget. Great for older teens and adults.

review by [robin](#)

[back to top](#)

Amnesia

ISBN: 1561632961

by John Malloy

NBM Publishing, Inc 2001

I have a rather b tendency toward considering rambling, esoteric questions about the nature of reality-- just ask my friends. Some of my favorite stories, graphic novels or otherwise, are those that twist reality that little bit and ask what if? In the unique Amnesia, first time graphic novel author John Malloy had created a reality and dreamscape so intertwined that the distinctions the two are both unnecessary and troublesome. Chloe seeks an interview with filmmaker Ike Reuben, but both are already connected by a string of dreams and realities that neither is completely aware of. The disjointed storytelling makes for a tough read at times, and the meaning depends almost entirely on the reader's interpretation. The artwork veers far from the usual comic art, using recycled photographs and line art together, the artist battering and warping those images into frames almost as tenuous as the story. Although not for everyone, I, for one, am curious what this author will create next.

review by [robin](#)

[back to top](#)

Until the Full Moon (Volume 1)

ISBN: 1932480889

by Sanami Matoh

Broccoli Books, 2004

U.S. manga readers know Sanami Matoh as the author of [FAKE](#), an endearing (and, for shonen ai, fairly realistic) romantic drama about two (male) police officers who fall in love. **Until the Full Moon**, the second of her works to become available in English, is something else entirely. Fans of [FAKE](#) will recognize the author's fondness for flamboyant hairstyles, outfits, and love at first sight, but **Until the Full Moon** takes place in a very different world. This is a world populated by vampires and werewolves, who trace their ancestry back to fairy tales and legends. David Vincent, a notorious player, is the son of a prominent vampire family. As a child, he was inseparable from his friend Marlo- son of a vampire father and a werewolf mother. He hasn't seen Marlo for ten years when Marlo's family arrives to pay the Vincent's a visit. They've come with a problem for Dr. Arnet Vincent, a famous doctor in the vampire clan. It seems that Marlo has inherited an unusual trait from his mother's werewolf clan: on full moon nights, instead of becoming a wolf, Marlo becomes a woman. Anxious to protect their child, Marlo's parents want to arrange a marriage between her- when she is a her- and David. Marlo protests, but, as her father remarks, "I'm not going to let 100 or 200 year old kids go decide what's best!" David, on the other hand, is intrigued- he's had feelings for Marlo since they were teens. As the two try to make sense of their situation, Marlo's female self begins to return David's love. Is Marlo prepared to accept that love as a man?

Despite the somewhat unbelievable premise of Marlo and David's sudden engagement, **Until the Full Moon** shares [FAKE](#)'s essential sweetness. David's love for Marlo knows no gender divisions, and Marlo's gender transformations are handled with sensitivity and humor. The story moves so quickly, however, that it's a bit hard to believe in the intensity of David's feelings. The couple have declared their love by the end of the volume, but their personalities have yet to be fully established. The publisher has rated Volume 1 for ages 16 and up. While Marlo and David are sometimes a straight couple and sometimes not, depictions of sensuality are fairly mild throughout. **Until the Full Moon** is not necessarily a must-have for manga collections, but it is an oddly endearing tale of love and acceptance.

review by [jen](#)

[back to top](#)

Artesia: Artesia Afield

ISBN: 1932386009

By Mark Smylie

Archaia Studios Press 2003

Artesia's world lies somewhere between ancient Rome, ancient Greece and medieval Byzantium. Artesia was born and raised to be a courtesan in the royal household, but when war came she became a battle commander. **Artesia Afield** is classic fantasy material done extremely well. I have read more than my fair share of bad fantasy novels, and finding fantasy executed with this level of skill is very rare. Mark Smylie has created a rich historical, political and religious background for his novel. Artesia is a real character, and she makes her choices with awareness of what they will cost herself and others. She uses all the weapons she possesses, from wily seductions to force of arms, to achieve her goals (it's the seductions as well as the

appearances of goddesses and spirits, all displaying a good bit of bare flesh, that push this volume firmly into the older teen and adult category). Working with watercolors Mark Smylie paints a rich picture of Artesia's world. The precision and detail that he puts into the images in combination with the lush colors creates a vibrant whole. My only quibble with the book is that for inexplicable reasons Artesia consistently goes into battle in a chain mail thong, which just seems impractical, but that really is a minor quibble in what otherwise is a well written and beautifully illustrated graphic novel.

review by [petra](#)

[back to top](#)

Ruse: Enter the Detective

ISBN: 1931484198

by Mark Waid

Art by Butch Guice

CrossGen 2002

I am a huge fan of Sherlock Holmes mysteries. I love period mysteries of all sorts, but nothing quite beats the acid tone and deliciously complex mind games of Holmesian cases. Ruse beautifully plays with the Holmes mythology, featuring a razor sharp but emotionally distant detective, Simon Archard, and his beautiful and equally witty partner, Emma Bishop. Note that Ruse avoids one of the major problems with Holmes' world: the lack of admirable women. Set in Partington, on the planet Arcadia, a world very much like Victorian England, with slight differences ñ the magic here is real, gargoyles swarm the city rather like pigeons. Fighting equally wonderful villains, from the bewitchingly seductive Miranda Cross (Archard's Moriarty, perhaps?) to Archard's devious ex-partner, Ruse is replete with wordplay, action, magic, and, of course, feats of deduction Holmes would, if not embrace, acknowledge with an eloquent eyebrow.

review by [robin](#)

[back to top](#)

Fables: Legends in Exile

ISBN: 1563899426

By Bill Willingham

Art by Lan Medina, Steve Leialoha, and Mark Buckingham

DC Comics (Vertigo) 2003

It's a familiar story: a Manhattan party girl has gone missing, and her apartment is stained with blood. A hard-boiled detective must sort out the clues. But in this case, the girl is Rose Red (Snow White's sister), the detective is the Big Bad Wolf, and the Manhattan they live in is known as Fabletown: a secret city that exists alongside the "mundane" one we know. Once upon a time, the fairy-tale characters we knew and loved lived in their own storybook worlds. Then the Adversary came, conquering their lands and destroying our most beloved fantasies. The survivors now live side by side with human beings, their magical natures hidden. Princesses and witches, wolves and pigs coexist (mostly) in peace. When Rose Red disappears, everyone becomes a suspect. The killer could be Rose's boyfriend Jack (a known thief from his beanstalk days), Bluebeard, who wanted to add Rose to his collection of wives, or even the lovely Snow White herself. The investigation plays out against a fascinating picture of fairy-tale characters making their way in

the modern world. Willingham's Fabletown and its inhabitants are funny, touching, and totally true to life; to say more would be to spoil the fun of finding out what becomes of them as they try to live happily ever after. Fractured fairy-tale and fantasy fans will love Fables. Librarians should keep in mind, however, that it's published by Vertigo; there are a few panels of adult content. You just can't trust a Prince Charming...

review by [Jen](#)

[back to top](#)

Fables: Animal Farm

ISBN: 140120077X

by Bill Willingham

Art by Mark Buckingham and Steve Leialoha

DC Comics (Vertigo) 2003

In the first volume of this Eisner-nominated series, we learned that our beloved fairy-tale characters had been driven from their magical lands by the Adversary and forced to take refuge in the mundane world- Manhattan, to be exact. Those who can pass for human (like quarreling sisters Snow White and Rose Red) live in the city. Those who cannot- the Three Little Pigs, Reynard the Fox, and many others- live hidden from mortal eyes on a huge farm in upstate New York. While the Fable government tries to make life as pleasant as possible at the Farm, a revolution is brewing- a revolution that should look familiar to fans of George Orwell. Egged on by Goldilocks and her violent, revolutionary rhetoric, the Three Little Pigs are plotting a coup. Why should the human-looking Fables control their destinies? And when will the Fables rise up to take back their lands?

Animal Farm is even better than its predecessor, [Legends in Exile](#). Willingham continues to develop his concept of a fairy-tale Diaspora, exploring the Fables' politics, history, and relationships, while telling one heck of a tale. Fables is literate, funny, and surprising. Like **Legends in Exile**, **Animal Farm** is appropriate for older teens; the story necessitates some depiction of violence and the characters use a few bad words. I highly recommend both volumes of **Fables** for teen or adult library collections. Like the best fairy tales, it continues to amaze me.

review by [jen](#)

[back to top](#)

Witchblade: Origins

ISBN: 1887279652

By Christina Z. Wohl

Art by Michael Turner

Image Comics 2001

As a relative newbie to the comics world, one of the prejudices I've had to shake off is the idea the women are consistently presented as eye-candy and little more. You know, skin-tight outfits, provocative poses, few lines. So you can imagine I was a little, well, put off by my first glimpse of tough NYPD detective Sara Pezzini ñ dolled up in a skin-tight red mini dress and drawn with impossible proportions. My mouth twitched and I'm sure I ended up with a bit of a scowl on my face. Nonetheless, I decided to keep going and

see just how stereotypical this buxom lass would be.

I'm glad I did. Sara, on top of being a sexy thing, is smart, b, capable, independent, and, always my favorite, snide. Sara has been chosen by the mythical Witchblade, a legendary weapon of extraordinary power that chooses its female wielder for better or for worse. As the Witchblade exerts its control, Sara loses her beloved partner, is stuck with a rookie to replace him, and is suddenly being courted by the one man who holds the key to the Witchblade, the dangerously attractive Kenneth Irons. One visual decision that evens the score is that the men in the book, from nemesis Kenneth Irons to potential brother in arms Ian Nottingham, are drawn with equally impossible proportions and beauty. The artwork and colors are jewel-like, vivid with light and sharp lines. The plot is satisfyingly complicated, emotional, and happily, edged with a no-nonsense humor that is too often lacking in fantasy tales of destiny. If you're looking for a heroine with muscles, brains and beauty, look no further.

On a side note, yes, this title and its sequels are the inspiration for the TNT TV show, now cancelled, **Witchblade**. I enjoyed the show a lot, but as with most adaptations, the graphic novels follow a different plot and creative idea, so check them out.

review by [robin](#)

[back to top](#)