

Real Deal

King

ISBN: 1560971126

by Ho Che Anderson

Fantagraphic Books 1993

In his introduction to this first volume, Ho Che Anderson emphasizes biography as an interpretation of the facts he had gathered, and as a kind of meditation of the man behind the legacy. He wonders about how to uncover the man beneath all of the legend and idolization. He asks, quite rightly, how far we as a nation and as a people have come in the pursuit of Civil Rights since the turbulent 60s. At the center of his questioning turns the life of Martin Luther King, Jr., in all its glory and flawed moments, and he deftly creates a portrait of a complex man. This volume follows the beginning of his life, from childhood in the South through his courting of Coretta Scott to the infamous stabbing in Atlanta, 1960. The artwork is a mix of harsh black and white images, almost like snapshots taken with an intense flash, carefully placed instances of color, and images and photographs taken during the events portrayed. The mix of visual medium complements the stark nature of the writing -- in cracking open MLK's life, Mr. Anderson is attempting to uncover the power and the reality of the man through a string of events, from public speeches to personal moments, as they happened and as they are remembered. I was personally reminded anew what a powerful speaker Martin Luther King, Jr. was, and how vital that talent is in persuasion and personality for leaders. Happily, the second volume was just recently published, in 2002, and the third is due out this coming May. An ambitious work, certainly, and told with a storyteller's flair to make history live.

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Testament

ISBN: 1585167657

by Jim Krueger

Metron Press, 2003

Testament is a work I was not expecting to adore for the very simple reason that I'm entirely unaware of most of the stories of the Old Testament. I have virtually no religious background and so even well-known stories are new to me, so I was worried the stories would not resonate with me as they might with another, more familiar reader. First off, I was wrong -- the stories are presented in simple language and with outstanding illustrations across the board. The fact that I didn't know them may have in fact been a bonus -- the drama was all new to me -- but I've compared my reactions with friends who knew more ahead of time and they were equally impressed. The frame for these tales is conversation in a bar with a familiar bartender, but each tale has its own art and style. My only quibble is that many of the stories felt rushed -- I wanted more detail, more time to digest each. This title is published by a subsidiary of the American Bible Society, and **Testament** is refreshingly free of any preachiness -- they are presented as stories, not a religious text, nor are they intended to be taken as such. The violence represented, for certainly the old Testament is not full of peaceful stories, is at around a PG-13 level. For anyone looking for a unique and excellently illustrated addition to their collection, check **Testament** out.

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Fax from Sarajevo

ISBN: 1569713464

By Joe Kubert

Dark Horse Comics 1998

For a lot of us, as horrific as the conflict in Bosnia is, it is also very far away. It has been fairly easy, in the recent past, to sit in our kitchens and living rooms and distance ourselves from such atrocities -- 9/11 has changed all of that. Author Joe Kubert, known for his war comics and work on legendary comic heroes such as Superman and Batman, was drawn into the current conflict by relating the story of Ervin Rustemagic, a businessman and friend of the author's caught in 1992 in Sarajevo as war broke out. As the conflict mounted, and genocide once again became a reality, Ervin's only contact with the outside world through a fax machine. A powerful document of recent events that should not be overlooked.

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Fallout: Robert Oppenheimer, Leo Szilard, and the Political Science of the Atomic Bomb

ISBN: 0966010639

by Jim Ottaviani

Art by Janine Johnston, Chris Kemple, Steve Lieber, Vince Locke, Bernie Mireault, Eddy Newell, Jeff Parker, Tom Orzechowski, Nate Pride

GT Labs 2001

The atomic bomb remains perhaps one of the most brilliant and most heinous inventions of the human race, and the issues surrounding its creation, in science, politics, and war are the focus of this cautionary tale. Jim Ottaviani, a science Academic librarian, has ably traced the beginnings of the race to capture the secret of the atom through to the triumph and tragedy of the atom bomb's first test. Ottaviani excels at portraying the men involved, including Enrico Fermi, Albert Einstein, Neils Bohr, and Richard Feynman. However, this story focuses on the leader of them all, Los Alamos director Robert Oppenheimer, a fine scientist and a persuasive and diplomatic middle-man between the group of scientists and the military. The success of these scientists' creation is certainly double-edged, and Oppenheimer himself was scrutinized and persecuted over questions of his loyalty to the U.S. The artwork is by a number of fine creators, all in elegant black and white, though Oppenheimer's interrogation at the finish is formatted in an unfortunately confusing manner. This title remains powerful look at a defining moment of the 20th century, provoking the reader to question invention at all costs and voicing a very simply warning: just because we can do something doesn't always mean that we should.

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Persepolis: the Story of a Childhood

ISBN: 0375422307

By Marjane Satrapi

Pantheon Books, 2003

As a child, Marjane Satrapi wanted to be a prophet when she grew up. She even began writing her own

holy book; among her dictates were such rules as "no old person should have to suffer" and "all maids should eat at the table with the others." Raised by modern, Marxist-leaning parents, Marji was an outspoken child who eagerly embraced new ideas. She would have the chance to wrestle with a lot of them: she was 10 years old when the events of Iran's Islamic Revolution began. **Persepolis** has received tons of hype from both comics fans and the mainstream press; like Art Spiegelman's **Maus**, **Persepolis** won over people who had never thought a comic book could convey serious subject matter. Marjane Satrapi's funny, wise, heart-wrenching book deserves every bit of praise it has received. Her stark, witty black and white forms have the power to make you laugh in one panel and gasp with horror in the next. Her writing is full of subtle insight as she shows us a child and a country caught up in revolution, fundamentalism, and war. Most importantly, she shows us how ordinary lives go on amid uncertainty and violence. She's also unbelievably funny. U.S. fans eagerly await the second volume of Satrapi's memoir, which was originally written and published in France (where the author now lives). Curse those lucky French! While adults are more likely to pick up **Persepolis**, politically- or historically-minded teens will love it too. It's a natural choice for teachers and librarians. If you need to convince someone that comics can educate as well as entertain, go buy this book right now.

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Maus: A Survivor's Tale

ISBN: 0394747232

By Art Spiegelman

Marvel Books 2001

Yes, **Maus** won the Pulitzer Prize. Yes, it's been translated into countless languages and is hailed by critics and readers alike as *the* graphic novel. These are all well-deserved recognitions of a monumental work -- but the real reason you should read **Maus** is the simple, unforgettable punch of one survivor's story. Art Spiegelman captures in spare black and white his father's story of surviving the Holocaust in Poland, as well as his own strained relationship with his parents and the weight of history. You may think you've heard it all before -- the smoke stacks, the tattooed numbers, the ghettos. Think again -- Spiegelman manages to take all the grim humor and the horror and make it fresh -- a kick we all need every once in a while to appreciate both the strength and evil present in humanity.

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Blankets

ISBN: 1891830430

by Craig Thompson

Top Shelf 2003

The test for any good book is simple: can you put it down easily after you've started reading? Is there a sense of loss every time you stop reading? Well, with Craig Thompson's **Blankets**, it passed this test with flying colors -- I stayed up into the wee hours of the morning to finish it, every once in a while glancing at the clock as it approached 1, then 2, then 3 AM, knowing I should go to sleep, but then just turning the page and ignoring all practicality. I was lost in the beauty of the artwork, the story. My eyes just wouldn't

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The subtitle of this volume is "an illustrated novel" and, clocking in at 582 pages and never published in serial form, it lives up to that title. Thompson's previous graphic novel, **Good-bye, Chunky Rice** was a bit of an oddity to me -- a melancholy meditation on love, loss, and companionship that left me a bit adrift once I finished it, wondering who it was aimed at while still being haunted by a lingering sense of sadness. **Blankets**, on the other hand, was more accessible, but also left me with an emotional aftereffect seldom equaled by other graphic novels. This tome follows, as a memoir with fictionalized bits, the author's senior year of high school, a collision of first love, faith, and the drive to create art. The work is peppered with flashbacks that inform the main story, showing glimpses of the upbringing that edges all of Craig's current concerns, from his parents' fundamentalist beliefs to the acid of schoolyard taunts.

Thompson's artwork is jagged and fluid all at once, breaking the customary panel boundaries to jab you in the heart with moment after moment of regret, passion, contented silence and crushing doubt. Thompson has a wonderful ear for family dynamics, as well as the rhythm of conversation -- simple exchanges with the power to lift you up or break your heart. I'm hard pressed to come up with another more perfect marriage of art and word. The issues, from brotherly affection, disintegrating love, a search for true faith, and memories that always return, are appealing to almost any audience, though with occasional nudity and more mature content the book probably best belongs in an older teen or adult collection. I went to sleep besotted with the story and lines of this ambitious work, content to dream of such lyrical memories, not to mention itching to pick up my own pencil and record it all.

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Pedro and Me: Friendship, Loss, and What I Learned

ISBN: 0805064036

by Judd Winick

Henry Holt and Company 2000

You all know the tag line of **The Real World**: Seven people are chosen to live in a house to find out what's "real." In 1993, in San Francisco, the world was given an unexpected, and perhaps unasked for, gift --