Best Graphic Novels and Comics of 2015

FICTION

SOUTHERN BASTARDS. By Jason Aaron and Jason Latour
GN FIC AAR
Southern Bastards seems to begin as a “southern fried” crime comic about a guy with a big stick ready to kick some ass, but then, a few issues in, it takes a shockingly unexpected turn and becomes a larger story about family, football, and southern life. Created by two good ol’ boys themselves, Jason Aaron and Jason Latour, the comic steps carefully between honoring, poking fun at, and eviscerating the culture the creators grew up around. (Mental Floss)

STEP ASIDE, POPS. By Kate Beaton
GN FIC BEA
Kate Beaton is arguably the best cartoonist of the past decade, and maybe the greatest to come out of the webcomic scene so far. Her wildly popular webcomic Hark! A Vagrant is known for its smart and cheeky retellings of moments from history and literature, but she branches out into other areas as well, such as autobio, parodies of vintage book covers, and even superheroes. Her new collection, Step Aside, Pops, showcases this variety of material and has some of her funniest moments to date. (Her belligerent, fed-up Wonder Woman and her intrepid Lois Lane who doesn’t have time for Superman’s secret identity shenanigans are great.) Rest assured, this collection also has strips about Chopin, Wuthering Heights, and Civil Rights activist Ida B. Wells among many other subjects. (Mental Floss)

THE FADE OUT. By Ed Brubaker and Sean Philips
GN FIC BRU
Set around a troubled 1948 film production that is halted when its leading lady turns up dead, The Fade Out explores the seediness of the movie business and the pathos behind the types of films that inspired Brubaker and Philips’s entire body of work. (Mental Floss)
BORB. By Jason Little
GN FIC LIT
Borb tells the story of a down-on-his-luck homeless man, playing it for laughs by using the punchline format of a newspaper comic strip. That may seem insensitive and offensive, but Jason Little is aiming for a visceral reaction from his readers. By presenting his story in a style derived from classic Depression-era strips like Little Orphan Annie, Little calls to mind the lovable, hapless hobo archetype of that period, but pairs it with the horrific situations that real homeless people actually experience today. While it will make you laugh at times, it is sure to disturb you even more. (Mental Floss)

WUVABLE OAF. By Ed Luce
GN FIC LUC
This is a book that is proud and confident in its depiction of a gay subculture that’s made up of thrash metal, professional wrestling, and cats. Oaf is a shy, gentle “bear” who sells toy animals stuffed with his own body hair. When he falls for the diminutive Eiffel, the lead singer of the metal band The Ejaculoids, we get a sweet, hilarious, and surprising story of dating in a fictional version of San Francisco. (Mental Floss)

THE SCULPTOR. By Scott McCloud
GN FIC MCC
Down-and-out sculptor David Smith’s childhood dream for an artistic superability comes true, at a price: he has only 200 days to use it, and then he’ll die. But his plans for this time don’t include falling for an aspiring actress. A heartbreaking story of love, loss, and the meaning of creativity; a masterpiece with rare depth, resonance, and humanity. (Library Journal)

TWO BROTHERS. By Gabriel Bá and Fábio Moon
GN FIC MOO
Adapted from Milton Hatoum’s The Brothers, one of the most popular novels in Brazil, it is Moon and Bá’s most sophisticated and mature work to date. Bá’s stylized lines and fluid sense of storytelling capture the setting of mid-century Manaus, where the dark, sexy, and tragic conflict bubbles up in a city where two rivers (one dark and one light) converge. (Mental Floss)

THE MULTIVERSE. By Grant Morrison
GN FIC MOR
As the existence of the multiverse faces an unstoppable threat, Morrison checks in on various parallel DC universes, like one in which Superman was adopted by Hitler and another where the spoiled grown children of the Justice League avoid paparazzi and party like a bunch of super-powered Kardashians. Each is so good that you wish he’d write stories about them forever. (Mental Floss)
BLACK RIVER. By Josh Simmons
GN FIC SIM
This short graphic novel follows a group of women (and one man) across a devastated countryside in search of a town they learned of from a found diary. Along the way they do some things that sound fun on the surface (taking a drug called “Gumdrops,” having sex, and even going to a comedy club), but everything is imbued with Simmons’s sense of absurdist depravity and unsettling horror. (Mental Floss)

SACRED HEART. By Liz Suburbia
GN FIC SUB
At first, the book seems to be a series of vignettes about high school parties, drinking, sex, and adolescent angst, but then kids start showing up dead and no one seems too preoccupied by it. The landscape starts to become littered with decadent graffiti, and you begin to notice the total absence of adults anywhere in the story. It’s a mystery that intrigues the reader much more than the characters within the story itself. Her drawings are bold and confident and her characters are full of life and unique personality. (Mental Floss)

KILLING AND DYING. By Adrian Tomine
GN FIC TOM
Cool, elegant art understates the frustration of angry white men and the world they can’t understand, in Tomine’s devastating short story anthology. Each protagonist is desperate to hold on to some symbol only he or she believes in—whether it’s topiary sculpture or an old apartment—with painful results for everyone around them. (Publishers Weekly)

Nanjing: The Burning City. By Ethan Young
GN FIC YOU
A brilliant and accomplished fictional graphic novel about two Chinese soldiers trying to escape the fallen city of Nanjing during the second Sino-Japanese war. Along the way they are confronted by the atrocities committed by the conquering Japanese soldiers, some of the most horrific committed in the history of modern warfare. It is a war that is not depicted often in Western media, and Young, who is the son of Chinese immigrants, pours a lot of emotion into it. His bold brushwork and dramatic chiaroscuro lighting evoke some of the great creators of wartime comics like Harvey Kurtzman and Joe Kubert, and this story stands right up there with the best war comics of all time. (Mental Floss)
THE STORY OF MY TITS. By Jennifer Hayden
GN B HAYDEN,J.
Hayden combines coming of age with coming of illness to chronicle family loves and lives. She and her mother both survive breast cancer, while the girlfriend of her husband’s dad dies of it, and her husband’s mom from lung cancer. With poignantly detailed drawings, Hayden reveals life’s chaotic backdrop as people adjust to change—in social mores, romantic ties, and health. (Library Journal)

THE ARAB OF THE FUTURE. By Riad Sattouf
GN B SATTOUF,R.
Dragged from Libya to France to Syria by his perpetually optimistic father, who desperately believes in the promise of a pan-Arabic state, Sattouf recalls a childhood filled with cruelties, absurdities, and unforgettable smells, which he somehow manages to put on the page. This densely detailed memoir has been a controversial best seller in France and remains all too timely. (Publishers Weekly)

OUT ON THE WIRE: THE STORYTELLING SECRETS OF THE NEW MASTERS OF RADIO.
By Jessica Abel
GN 791.44 ABE
Abel reports with visual finesse the complicated creative process behind public radio journalism. Drawing on research and interviews relating to Snap Judgment and seven other shows, she illustrates how ideas, character, story structure, voice, and editing fit together. (Library Journal)