

Graphic violence also abounds in the books about Arwyn in *Sojourn: From the Ashes* (CrossGen Comics, 1-931484-15-5). Arwyn is a different sort, more traditionally beautiful than Artesia, with her blonde hair and classic face; she too is on a quest. After the death of her husband and child, she seeks the destruction of Mordath, a restored-to-life evil tyrant. Her sidekick, the one-eyed Gareth the Bowman, and her dog, Kreeg, accompany her; Gareth narrates their adventures. Arwyn is as approachable as Artesia is remote; both are compelling, well drawn (though in very different styles—*Sojourn* is written, penciled, inked, and colored by different people, where Artesia is all Smylie's work), and assisted by supernatural forces. Arwyn is far more reminiscent of old comic book heroes: she sports a beautiful green-and-gold archer's outfit, snug leggings, and high, tight boots, and Gareth is straight out of Robin Hood in his lace-up shirt and leggings. Despite their misadventures, Arwyn and Gareth manage to look elegant most of the time.

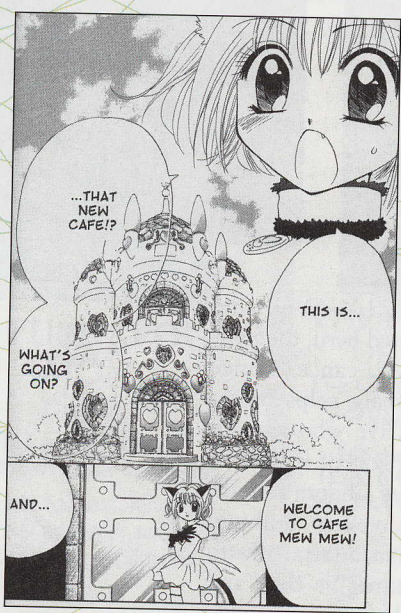


Image from: *Tokyo Mew Mew*, Tokyopop

The nearly wordless *The Frank Book* by Jim Woodring (Fantagraphics 1-56097-534-2) draws the eye like a bejeweled train wreck. Its pages offer disturbing violence and bold drawings in both black and white and intensely vivid colors. Frank, a catlike creature, lives in a strange world with the Manhog and Pupshaw, a little doglike creature that looks like a house with a tail. Eerie tales unfold and creatures are devoured and dismembered with lots of gore as Frank and Pupshaw move through exotic settings.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is *Herobear*, by Mike Kunkel (Astonish Factory, 0-9721259-1-4). Drawn mostly in black and white, with only Herobear's cape and Santa Claus's suit colored in, this is great stuff no matter the reader's age. Herobear is magic. After Grandfather's death at Christmastime, Tyler's family moves into his grandfather's house, and the boy receives Herobear as his inheritance. Tyler must cope with grief, a new school, bullies, and young love. Not only is Herobear a lot more bear than Tyler thought (together they take on an evil robot, bullies, and an evil nemesis), but Henry the butler turns out rather like Batman's very proper Alfred, and there's even a secret office accessible



only through a bookshelf in Tyler's room. The drawings are charming and filled with animation techniques—many different poses (and transmutations) to indicate, for instance, Herobear's morphing from ten-inch stuffed bear into ten-foot caped ursine crusader.

*The Dark Horse Book of Hauntings* (Dark Horse Comics, 1-56971-958-6) is a collection of eight tales and many artists' work. While all have their macabre charms (including the Doré-like endpapers and the illustrated narrative ghost story "Thurnley Abbey"), by far the standout piece is "Stray" by Evan Dorkin and Jill Thompson—the story of a haunted doghouse. Done with humor and sympathy, and tucked in at the end of the book, this one is a gem among gems.

Graphic novels also offer the sublime: NBM/ComicsLit provides such extravagant titles as a version of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (one volume of which, 1-56163-342-9, was previously reviewed in *ForeWord*) and an adaptation of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* by P. Craig Russell (1-56163-350-X), adorned with such beautiful illustrations, extravagant colors, hints of art nouveau elements, and the clarity of early comic drawings, that one could spend a pleasurable afternoon just perusing the pictures. Vertical, Inc. is reissuing Osamu Tezuka's classic *Buddha, Volume One: Kapilavastu*, a manga version of the life of Buddha in an eight-volume epic (0-932234-43-8, reviewed in this issue). Done in black and white, this is indeed classic manga: Tezuka's sure hand, particularly in the expressions of both people and animals, lends an extra poignancy to what is already a moving, yet vividly active, story.

With such a superb selection of subject matter, and such a diverse pool of readers, the days of hiding graphic novels under the covers and reading them with a flashlight are over. Instead, they're out in the open and justly flaunted, where their extraordinary artwork and equally extraordinary—and timely—messages can be appreciated by everyone.



Image from: *The Magic Flute* - Nantier, Beall, Minoustchine

Image from: *Remembrance of Things Past*, NBM/ComicsLit