

Jan 2-8/2004 Budden

# Reviews

## Comics, Forlorn Rodents, Sibling Gods and a Wartime Fixer and graphic novels from 2003



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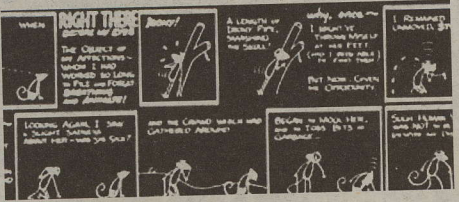
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### QUIMBY THE MOUSE By Chris Ware | Fantagraphics Books 56 pages, hardcover | \$25

Exquisitely crafted, with its hand-lettered gold-embossed cover, this book seems like a remnant of a bygone era. Quimby is a small, forlorn rodent who travels through a paneled landscape of woe and loss. Most of these tabloid-size strips, created during Ware's undergraduate days, are formal explorations of the medium itself. No cartoonist on this planet is more fluent in the language of comics than Ware. Each page is an aria of color, line and type that floats the reader through time and space. Ware's formal exploration is never without a greater purpose; beneath the surface of every thrillingly constructed page is an equally powerful emotional undertow. —J.S.



### PALOMAR: THE HEARTBREAK SOUP STORIES (LOVE AND ROCKETS) By Gilbert Hernandez | Fantagraphics Books | 512 pages, hardcover | \$40

Sadly, so much of what passes as examples of great comics has to be appreciated in context. Groundbreaking work, in a medium where the bar is set so low, has a short shelf life. What is astonishing about this mammoth collection (20 years of stories) is how time has not diminished its potency. It would be fair to call *Palomar* timeless literature. Centering his tales on a fictional Hispanic-American town and its inhabitants, Hernandez fashions a mythic soap opera that never approaches heavy-handedness. Hernandez's direct, charming cartooning style is unaffected by pretensions and allows the inner lives of his characters to surface in all their troubled glory. —J.S.



### SHRIMPY AND PAUL AND FRIENDS By Marc Bell | Highwater Books 472 pages, softcover | \$17



### THE SANDMAN: ENDLESS NIGHTS (BOOK 11) | By Neil Gaiman, illustrated by Glen Fabry, Milo Manara, Miguelanxo Prado, Frank Quietly, P. Craig Russell, Bill Sienkiewicz, Barron Storey | DC Vertigo | 160 pages, hardcover | \$25

*Endless Nights* marks Gaiman's return to the highly praised Sandman series. If you're not familiar with these stories, the title of this volume is a play on words referring to The Endless—seven sibling gods. A chapter is dedicated to each: Death, Desire, Destruction, Delirium, Despair, Destiny and the Sandman himself, Dream. But here as in Greek myth it's truly the gods who serve the people, as Gaiman weaves very human tales, fraught with emotion and irony. There is the mercenary in love since childhood with the alluring Death; the child, traumatized, who finds temporary escape in Delirium. Even the mighty Dream suffers common heartbreak from a mere mortal (with the insidious aid of Desire). This series and this volume are some of the more entertaining and elegant stories put to comic, the individual chapters standing alone but in volumes tracing a much deeper history. —B.S.



### THE METAMORPHOSIS | By Peter Kuper (adapted from Franz Kafka) | Crown | 80 pages, hardcover | \$18

In comic and cinematic retellings of classic literature, the new work can often compete with and even replace original memories of those books. This may sound like an odd way to begin a favorable review, but it's a fair caveat, and one that Peter Kuper may have confronted as he conjured the imagery for his adaptation. Kuper's drawings inject Kafka's story with a quicker pace and a bit more humor, but all the while preserving the pathos and surrealism of Gregor Samsa's metaphoric fate. —B.S.



### THE FIXER | By Joe Sacco | Drawn & Quarterly Publications | 106 pages, hardcover | \$25

Few newscasts will give you a clearer or more indelible picture of recent global conflict than one of Joe Sacco's books. Often told in a self-effacing first person, they are not pure journalism — though journalists rarely get as close to their subjects and the truth as Sacco does. *The Fixer* is no different. As Sacco explains, fixers are locals who are paid by foreign journalists to translate and provide information. They are a necessary and almost never-mentioned component of wartime journalism. Through Sacco's eyes we meet his fixer, Neven, and through Neven's eyes we get a subjective but detailed picture of the fighting in Bosnia. This book is a gripping education and leaves you hoping that Sacco will soon buy a ticket to Iraq. See Kristine McKenna's interview with Joe Sacco in this issue, page 12. —B.S.



### Buddha, Volumes 1 & 2 By Osamu Tezuka | Vertical 400 pages each, hardcover | \$25

These volumes, first published in Japan in the late '80s, are finally making it to the U.S. thanks to Vertical. Infused with humor and history, the epic of Siddhartha is perhaps Osamu Tezuka's crowning achievement and illustrates why, without irony, Tezuka is referred to as "The King of Japanese Comics." His penwork is remarkable — at times resembling master etchings. Even more remarkable considering the entire story spans over 3,000 pages. Vertical is publishing all eight volumes of this amazing work. —B.S.



### SOUTHPAW | By Scott Morse AdHouse Books | 126 pages, softcover | \$10

This is a beautiful little book from comic artist