



M

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Behind every great suspense thriller lurks the shadow of *M*. In Fritz Lang's first sound film from 1931, Peter Lorre delivers a haunting performance as a serial killer--a whistling pedophile hunted by the police and brought to trial by the forces of the Berlin underworld.

In 1990, a young painter, Jon J Muth, continued his rise in the comic book industry by adapting the story of *M* into a four-issue comic book miniseries. Muth's photorealistic illustrations paved the way for the acceptance of painted comics, influencing a generation of artists who followed him.

Long out of print, these four issues are collected together for the first time as a hardcover graphic novel.

M Details

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Author : Jon J. Muth (Illustrations) , Darren Aronofsky (Introduction) , Adam Kempenaar (Introduction)

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From Reader Review M for online ebook

Brandon Telg says

This was a very good adaptation of the classic Fritz Lang film and, in fact, I thought that this was a better presentation for the material. I liked reading this more than I liked watching the film. So yeah, I'd recommend this.

Jon(athan) Nakapalau says

At first I thought - why? Just like a singer picking "My Way" and expecting the audience to like that version over Sinatra...what's the point? But this GN offers a new take on this classic...a take that will leave you stunned and remind you of how chilling M truly is. The photorealism of the art gives you a proximity to the crimes that will make your skin crawl. Take a chance on this...you will not be disappointed.

Nom Chompsky says

I only read comics and graphic novels every so often. Part of the disparity between reading books/watching films and reading comics stems from my time pursuing an English degree and film production training, where (for the most part, though not all) my professors would have turned gray over the idea that I read something less than literary, or in the film end, that a comic is just pretty storyboards.

Muth's reinvention of "M" is a very powerful reminder that comics speak to me on an entirely different plane than literature and film, and that they seem to take the best of both those other worlds and feed it back at a pace as comfortable as I need it to be.

There's something equally voyeuristic to a comic as there is to watching a film, but in the comic form you have even more control as a watcher, free to read forwards and backwards, to link visual rhymes and dissonances together at your leisure, to scrutinize visual composition, and really immerse yourself.

The effect of this medium takes Lang's initial premise for "M" and submerges us into it, implicates us more deeply in the grief of the mothers who've lost their children, the not-quite altruistic motives of frustrated criminals who hunt the villain to get the cops off their backs, and most importantly, seems to carve out a space for us to linger on the victims of these crimes; slashes of colour added to a balloon as it bobs menacingly like a lifelike doll or a harbinger of limp and lifeless bodies to come, the green of an apple in groped in the killers' hands, and the bloody slit across a ghostly child's throat—all these flourishes in detail to muse on as we as readers (viewers?) are brought to the kangaroo court and challenged in our outrage, and ripped away before catharsis (whatever nibble is available) might come from killing the bastard.

There is a greater grief to everything in the comic than in the film, I think, though I don't know whether it's an effect of the reproduced photos having an almost family-photo scrapbook intimacy (Muth photographed friends to later recreate with "silverpoint...graphite, powdered charcoal...and pastel...[and for the end of the book] oil paint on prepared paper"); the room to read quickly or linger as we please; the feeling of labour invested into the photorealistic reproductions; or the sinking feeling that we know what has happened to

these girls, that we've seen this film before, and that no matter how different this book feels than the film, we're still going to be left with these unanswered questions and no next panel to resolve them—our loss of control feels that much more severe in the comic as it closes, and these anxieties about protecting children (Germany was clearly in a bad way at the time the film was produced) are still palpable today, particularly in an age of helicopter-parenting, and in an era where neo-fascist ideals (stemming, i hope at least in part, from unbridled fears) have taken root in governments around the world once more.

The likeness of the painted panels to the film is also very much there, though uncanny now with new subjects, without the then-chubby Peter Lorre (this early role the one that'd typecast him as a villain and a creep for his entire career). This just-off off-brand re-articulation serves to really drive home the universality, expanding the Every-folk feel of the victims and the riled up citizens, of what a pedophile and child-murderer might look like, act like, be driven by; this could be anyone, and already my memory is serving to blur and interpolate the characters from the two mediums against one another.

My only criticism of the book would be that it lacks Lorre's likeness and this is just because I am a big fan of him. I suspect his inclusion would have distracted and muddied the book's strength in its ambiguities, its dark corners and menace growling in said corners.

Even if this book had sucked, it is a profound kind of conceptual exercise for Muth to have undertaken. I bought the book used for 12 bucks at the local comic shop, and I feel spoiled for having stumbled on it and for such a great price.

East Bay J says

If you're familiar with and enjoyed the 1931 Fritz Lang film, *M*, you're going to love this graphic novel version illustrated by Jon J. Muth. Muth's art imparts a sense of suspense and dread in much the same way that Lang's cinematography did so well. The story of a serial killer murdering children and ultimately facing a trial by a jury of his "peers" comes alive on these pages.

The one thing that's missing is the leitmotif, Hans Beckert's incessant whistling of Edvard Grieg's "Hall Of The Mountain King." Musical notes appear on the pages when Beckert is closing in on a victim, but the creepy feeling that whistling conveys is lost. It's a very large part of the film, in my humble opinion. An interesting note; Peter Lorre, who played Hans Beckert in the film, could not whistle! They had to get Lang to do the whistling for him.

In all, however, Muth's adaptation is superb. Very well done.

Tove says

This is a spectacular graphic novel based (as the subtitle suggests) on Fritz Lang's classic pre-film noir thriller "M," about a child killer in 1920's Berlin. I am a fan of the movie which can make it tough to accept a refurbished version, but this book is amazing! Jon Muth's illustrations are brilliantly dark and gritty with a high contrast photorealism. He combines the very filmic technique of showing zoomed-out locations, action, and tight close-ups. Absolutely beautiful and (of course) gripping story.

Richard Mansel says

I am not accustomed to reading graphic novels but this one is based on one of my favorite films. I found it fascinating.

Paul says

Re-read, March 1, 2013.

I have re-read this multiple time in the original 4-issue series, originally published by Eclipse.

This was the first time I'd read it in its new hardcover publication.

It is interesting to note that the story in the graphic novel is an adaptation of the Fritz Lang movie and not an exact copy. Muth makes some changes to better fit the format... Graphic Novels and Movies aren't the same thing, and I think the decision by Muth to make some slight changes were appropriate.

M (based on the screenplay by Fritz Lang, TPB collects M #1-4, 1998) published by Abrams; ISBN 0-8109-9522-0

Jon J. Muth (born July 28, 1960, in Cincinnati, Ohio) is an American comic book artist and children's book illustrator, known for his painted artwork.

Muth studied stone sculpture and shod? (??) (brush calligraphy) in Japan; and studied painting, printmaking, and drawing in England, Austria, and Germany.

His works include J. M. DeMatteis' graphic novel Moonshadow, Neil Gaiman's The Sandman: The Wake (along with Michael Zulli and Charles Vess), Mike Carey's Lucifer: Nirvana and Swamp Thing: Roots. Muth has gone on to an award-winning career as a children's book writer and illustrator. He received a Gold Medal from the Society of Illustrators, in 1999, for his illustrations in Come On, Rain! by Karen Hesse.

*All these decades later, Fritz Lang's **Metropolis** overshadows **M** in terms of fame and legacy. But **M**, the story of a serial killer who hunts children, is such a dark, macabre classic that even Lang considered it his best film. It's a seminal work, one of the most amazing accomplishments in cinema.*

*It was nearly 20 years ago that Jon J Muth, a writer and illustrator of children's books and comic books, decided to create a graphic series based on **M**. Muth's work back then remains as vital, impressive and simply awe-inspiring now, especially since it has just been rereleased in a gorgeous hardcover format, which also includes an informative introduction and afterward that provide useful insights into the creative process behind the work.*

Muth gathered together friends, family and acquaintances to pose for photos that reenacted Lang's film. But this is no shot-by-shot, frame-by-frame recreation. Instead, Muth changes points of view and perspective to create a new experience, something far removed from its source material yet so lovingly inspired by it that it maintains respect at all times.

*Muth then took those photos and made drawings from them. His afterword explains the process, which involves silverpoint, graphite and charcoal, the effect of which is so stunning, so lush, that it's clear how much of an influence Muth's work here has had on generations of artists who followed in his footsteps. Reading **M** has the bizarre effect of feeling like you're looking at a series of old photographs, stepping back in time and experiencing a long-ago past first-hand.*

*And **M** is thrilling. The story is frightening on its own, with its terrifying notion of a serial killer who targets children. The murders leave the entire city in a state of panic, with the population demanding action from the police. As the police crack down on brothels, bars and gambling spots around town, the leaders of the city's seedy underground decide they have to take action to find the killer themselves, if only to keep their own businesses afloat.*

***M** has various themes of horror and old-gangster-style crime running through its rich pages. That Muth is able to carry this off without stepping on the toes of the original film is a testament to his larger-than-life abilities as an artist. Muth has gone on to create many other works in both comics and traditional publishing, but **M** remains such a glorious work, such a lovely piece of art, that it continues to inspire fellow artists. It continues to entertain and mesmerize readers as well.*

— **John Hogan**

Whitney Maas says

There are many people who gave this graphic novel minimal stars due to their inability to "see why" Muth felt compelled to "remake" this (very) classic film. For starters they should have read both the introduction that did nothing but praise the ever referenced style of Fritz as well as the afterword that explained in detail why Muth pulled such art together. Authors, directors, artists, and musicians all pull inspiration (and often duplicate) from those who came before them and this novel was simply an ode to Fritz's first talking film that set the tone for noir in the years that followed! Granted, as much of a noir film fan that I am, this one has always been difficult to take as seriously as I should because German always has a funny harsh sound to it that puts a barrier between emotional climaxes for me. Yet, the original film and Muth's creatively painted graphic novel are both epic in the nuances of mob mentality and the subtle fear of one's neighbor that can escalate in times of uncertainty.

Kudos all around.

Joshua says

Subtly disturbing and just plain gorgeous. I haven't actually seen the movie, so I can't judge the story's adaptation, but the art is so uncanny, it's hard to wrap your mind around. He's done these amazing drawings--in graphite, charcoal, pastels, and oils--of black-and-white photographs, but with each one, my perception of it would shudder for just an instant between "photograph" and "drawing." I dunno, they're hard to describe; check it out. The only choice I find weird is the use of a printed typeface for the dialogue and captioning rather than the usual hand-lettering, but other than that, **M** is a masterpiece.

Farren says

I'd like to withhold my comments on this book until I've actually seen the Fritz Lang film. For now what I'll say is that I'm extremely interested in his method of composition -- he staged it in Cincinnati, where he's from, and used his family and friends as characters. After staging each scene, he took a photograph, then reproduced it in silverpoint, adding graphite later. This reminds me of 20th century photorealist painters, especially Gerhard Richter (see similar composition here: http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_tCiY3quJAt0...).

So something about simulacra, intertext and hyperreality are pertinent to this discussion. Although I can't quite get my head around how yet, and shouldn't try until I see the film.

Liz Dalton says

The best part about his book: the art! The story itself was okay, a great climax with a lacking resolve. But the art...WOW!

Quentin Wallace says

4.5 stars. The only drawback was the art got a little confusing at times, at least to me.

This was a strong adaptation of a very strong movie. A similar story has been done a few times over the years. A serial killer is murdering children, and the search for the killer puts heat on the underworld in general. In order to get the cops off of their backs, the criminal element takes it upon themselves to find the killer. When *M* was filmed in 1931, this was still an original story. The idea of a child killer in a movie was probably shocking back then as well.

Now, moving from the movie to this hardcover graphic novel. The black and white painted art is very moody, and does a great job of conveying emotion and a creepy mood. At times, I did find the art confusing, which was really the only drawback. I actually started to watch the movie, but subtitled films just aren't my thing, so I decided to read the graphic novel instead. I remembered when the original comic series came out, but at the time I didn't know what *M* was. The comic even came with a flexi-disc recording of the killer whistling *In the Hall of the Mountain King*, which was what the killer whistled while stalking children.

So, even though I jumped all over the place with the review, the bottom line is this is a very entertaining graphic novel. If you've seen the movie, here's a chance to see a new take on it. If you haven't seen the movie, this is still a great read. Very highly recommended.

Natira says

Ich war neugierig, aber für mich "funktionierte" diese Graphic Novel nicht recht. Sie entfaltet trotz düsterer sorgfältig gearbeiteter Zeichnungen nicht den Sog des Films. Insbesondere konnte ich mich von der fehlenden Präsenz des Schauspielers Peter Lorres bei Lektüre der Graphic Novel nicht lösen, vermutlich weil er auf mich in dieser Rolle - besonders im Monolog am Ende - einen unglaublichen Eindruck hinterlassen

hat. Vielleicht erschweren die fotorealistischen Zeichnungen für mich die Akzeptanz dieser Umsetzung, weil ich den Film mit Ton und Musik und Peter Lorre noch so vor Augen habe - obwohl länger nicht gesehen -; durchaus möglich, dass mich eine abstraktere zeichnerische Adaption eher erreichen würde.

Anmerkung: Die von mir gelesene deutsche Ausgabe (Süddt. Zeitung Bibliothek, nicht Crosscult) enthielt Fensteraufschriften u. Ausschnitte auf englisch; meiner Ansicht nach hätten diese wie der Rest (Dialoge, Fahndungsplakat) übersetzt werden sollen.

Joel Griswell says

A fascinating adaptation of Fritz Lang's classic film into graphic novel form. Based on Lang's original script, this tale for the most part sticks pretty closely to the film, while naturally doing some abridgment of dialogue, and also inserting some clever visual ideas. Muth's art is fantastic, his photoreal painting style fits the grim, moody story very well. The dirty, brown-gray color makes the film come more alive, while still keeping that black-and-white feel. Muth also periodically adds some subtle colors that really add depth graphically. His artwork was groundbreaking at the time, and has served to pave the way for the idea of painted illustrations (instead of the traditional action comic cartoon), and has influenced many people, including Alex Ross. Muth makes some other unique choices from the original, for example, his Hans Beckert, is not the monsterish Peter Lorre, but is painted as a very normal, almost handsome young man, which only adds to the perversity of his situation, and the empathetic connection with such a twisted, but ultimately still human character.

Ultimately, a very interesting take on a fascinating, dark and very tragic story looking into the evil of mankind's heart and social justice. Overall, this flows much better than the film at times (I felt the first hour of the film was too bogged down in details and conversations), but maybe loses some of the power of real live performance, especially in the court-room climax. A rewarding experiment, and with so many comics being turned into films today, it's interesting to see it happen the other way.

Will Byrnes says

Based on the film by Fritz Lang, this version of "M" consists of paintings by Muth. This hardcover publication is a gathering together of a four-volume comic series first published in 1990. Muth uses dialogue balloons instead of sound. The loss of M's whistling is considerable but the images capture the tone of the film and the story well. He applies a bit of color from oil paint in these silverpoint on charcoal paintings, giving the work a very rich look. There is also musical notation across many images, a nice touch, but a very soft one for those of us unable to actually read music. A soft-colored purple balloon marks the first victim.

A blind street vendor totes green and yellow balloons. - from NYMAG.com

Muth is primarily known for his illustration of children's books, but he also has done considerable work in graphic novels. Not content to excel at art alone, Muth is a musician as well. He has written pieces to accompany exhibitions of his paintings, among other work

Jon J. Muth - from Amazon

The auburn shadow from a coffee cup suggests the blood that flows off-screen (or page). The images are both gorgeous and evocative. The story is familiar, crimes against children and a panicked public enraged into a violent frenzy. It was most interesting to read about Muth's technique. There is a reason that the paintings have such a life-like look. While the story may be dark, the art-work is brilliant and very satisfying. *M* is very satisfying for those already familiar with this artist's work and a wonderful introduction for those of us new to him.
