



# **The Ukrainian and Russian Notebooks: Life and Death Under Soviet Rule**

*Igort , Jamie Richards (Translator)*

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Written and illustrated by an award-winning artist and translated into English for the first time, Igort's *The Ukrainian and Russian Notebooks* is a collection of two harrowing works of graphic nonfiction about life under Russian foreign rule.

After spending two years in Ukraine and Russia, collecting the stories of the survivors and witnesses to Soviet rule, masterful Italian graphic novelist Igort was compelled to illuminate two shadowy moments in recent history: the Ukraine famine and the assassination of a Russian journalist. Now he brings those stories to new life with in-depth reporting and deep compassion.

In *The Russian Notebooks*, Igort investigates the murder of award-winning journalist and human rights activist Anna Politkovskaya. Anna spoke out frequently against the Second Chechen War, criticizing Vladimir Putin. For her work, she was detained, poisoned, and ultimately murdered. Igort follows in her tracks, detailing Anna's assassination and the stories of abuse, murder, abduction, and torture that Russia was so desperate to censor. In *The Ukrainian Notebooks*, Igort reaches further back in history and illustrates the events of the 1932 Holodomor. Little known outside of the Ukraine, the Holodomor was a government-sanctioned famine, a peacetime atrocity during Stalin's rule that killed anywhere from 1.8 to twelve million ethnic Ukrainians. Told through interviews with the people who lived through it, Igort paints a harrowing picture of hunger and cruelty under Soviet rule.

With elegant brush strokes and a stark color palette, Igort has transcribed the words and emotions of his subjects, revealing their intelligence, humanity, and honesty—and exposing the secret world of the former USSR.

## The Ukrainian and Russian Notebooks: Life and Death Under Soviet Rule Details

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Author : Igort , Jamie Richards (Translator)

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# From Reader Review The Ukrainian and Russian Notebooks: Life and Death Under Soviet Rule for online ebook

## sappho\_reader says

I'm fascinated by the Soviet Union and the Cold War so I always try to pick up new releases that look interesting. I came across this one by accident and I am so glad. First off, the book itself is so beautiful! I've never been this impressed before by a graphic novel. I love Igor's drawing style. He created such an eerie atmosphere with his drawings of people suffering and being tortured.

This story is told in two parts. The first is Ukrainian Notebook which deals with the Holodomor in 1932-33 in which Stalin's policies caused a famine that killed an estimated 2.5–7.5 million Ukrainians. The second is Russian Notebook which deals with the Russian war in Chechnya and assassination of journalist Anna Politkovskaya who asked the wrong questions.

Overall, these are two stories which I don't think the West is as aware as we should be. This was the first time I read about the famine, and although of course I'm familiar with Chechnya I did not know about the torture prisons and all the godawful things that happened at the hands of the Russian soldiers.

I wanted to give this 5 stars, but I felt the ending was too fragmented as there were a couple stories tacked on at the end that weren't directly related to the Ukraine or Chechnya. 4.5 stars.

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## Narumon says

*I won this book from a Goodreads Giveaway.*

This graphic novel is in two parts. The Ukrainian section is a series of "chapters", each a graphic rendition of someone's retelling of their experiences. Interspersed are short pieces on the relevant history. The Russian portion of the book examines the death of the Russian reporter Anna Politkovskaya and also retells several of the stories that she and her fellow journalists have reported.

This was not a get-through-it-in-one-sitting book, despite the graphic format, for two reasons. One, the topic was just too dark for me to get through in one sitting. I had to take breaks and remind myself that there was goodness to be found in humanity. And because it was a graphic novel, the images reinforces the message so there really was no looking away from the brutality. Two (and slightly unfortunately for me), after a while the stories just blended together into a chain of unending human suffering. And I think the stories deserved more from me. Reading one or two a day gave me time to properly reflect on the individual voices, instead of just remembering the gloom and doom.

That being said, I think the art in the book is fantastic and really lends itself to setting the mood for the story. You can tell the author put in a lot of time to listen and put together everyone's story. It is a stark, unforgiving, and hard hitting book, and well worth the read.

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## Esil says

I am not naturally drawn to graphic books, but I am fascinated by Eastern Europe so it was hard to pass up an

opportunity to read an advance copy of *The Ukrainian and Russian Notebooks*, a book of graphic non-fiction. The Notebooks are based on interviews Igort -- pseudonym for Igor Tuveri -- conducted with a number of Ukrainians and Russians living in contemporary Ukraine and Russia. The Ukrainian part of the notebooks focuses on the 20th century history of Ukrainian, including the horrendous forced famine in 1932 and extreme violence under Stalin. The Russian part focuses on contemporary Russia, and the death of a female journalist who was investigating atrocities in Chechnya. There is nothing cheery or lighthearted about this book despite the fact that it is in the form of drawings. What Igort depicts is not new to me nor does the format allow for much in depth information, but there's definitely a powerful and disturbing quality that Igort conveys with his expressive black and white drawings. This will not be for everyone, but it's a good -- although truly brutal -- graphic primer on 20th and 21st century Ukraine and Russia. Thank you to the publisher and Netgalley for an opportunity to read an advance copy.

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## **Dov Zeller says**

How many ways can people come up with to torment and kill each other when they are fed dehumanizing propaganda and forced to choose between violence against others or violence against themselves and their families? How much damage can people do once they've given up hope on the possibility justice in any form?

What happens to people who don't go along with the narratives an authoritarian regime has demanded they accept and propagate?

At what point did truth telling become so dangerous and governments so corrupt that assassination becomes just a fact of every day life, so much so that it is barely noticed by so many?

Well, I suppose those in power have always had PR problems that they try to solve through violence and efforts to control. And those who acknowledge injustice always have been a danger to those who wish to dominate people. Tyranny has always eliminated enemies of their desired narratives--threatened or killed those who try to break the spells wrought by propaganda and misinformation.

Even in a somewhat functional democracy speaking truth to power is dangerous. How much more so in a world in which human life has no value? And it is clear from this book how little human life is valued in the eyes of so many leaders and movements that have taken hold in Russia and connected regions.

This book is a testament to the power of truth and stories, the survival of suppressed narratives that live on even after their tellers have lost the will to live. And the work of journalists and activists and lawyers, risking their lives to try to defend or protect people and uncover and share their stories and predicaments. One such person discussed in the pages of this book is journalist and human rights activist Anna Politkovskaya, assassinated in 2006 at the age of 48 for her work investigating the 2nd Chechen war.

If you are looking for a light or uplifting read, stay far away from this collection of illustrated and cared for oral histories and investigative journalism. Its intimacy and compelling, often cinematic art, much of it in sepia tones, draws the reader (at least this one) on a journey that will not end once the book is set down.

Igort's Notebooks sheds a painful light on hushed histories of Ukrainian genocide in the 1930s and offers glimpses into the lives of soldiers fighting in the hellish Chechen wars--it gives voice to soldiers and human rights warriors fighting for their lives against a government war machine that sees them as worthless pawns

or outright enemies. This book delves into a history of large scale violence and corruption as well as individual assassinations of people who insists on telling the truth about injustice and government corruption.

This is so many books/experiences in one volume, held together by multifarious voices all attesting to brutality of one kind or another. And it is as sobering as it is tragic and horrifying. And it is beautiful, too. Not just the art, but the people willing to share their experiences and weaving a richer and richer tapestry of life, a kind of fighting that is also a testament to courage and love and compassion and the tenacity of truth even in the face of tyranny.

Reading it now it feels like a cautionary tale. Is this really the world the right wing government and right-wing populist movements here in the U.S. want to build? I asked a friend this question and they responded, without pausing: "Yeah. I think so." Devastating to consider.

It's definitely not the world I want to live in. I fear for us all as I witness the degradation of an already tenuous and corrupt democracy. And, each day I see acts of courage, people taking risks, making themselves vulnerable, and raising their voices to honor their vision of a more just and tenable home and a better world...

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### **Mandy says**

A remarkably powerful work of graphic non-fiction, a genre I am not particularly comfortable with, but which in this case won me over completely. The depiction of the horrors that have occurred in both Russia and the Ukraine are here vividly conveyed with very little need for commentary. Much to my surprise I found this a compelling and engaging book which teaches much about what has happened – and still happens – in this part of the world. The drawings are excellent, stark and moving. An original and unusual approach which works very well indeed.

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### **Zizeloni says**

A very good graphic novel mainly focusing on the Ukrainian famine of the 30s and the Chechnyan war. Horrible personal stories of starvation, cannibalism, torture. Also many political comments and explanations, Anna Politkovskaya's story (murdered for writing about the horrible things going on in Chechnya) and an epilogue about the recent Ukrainian-Russian war (which I actually did not really get).

Very good art and I learned many things.

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### **Siina says**

This. The Ukrainian and Russian Notebooks comic is probably the most important comic of the year. It's a devastating story consisting of smaller incidents that has led the world to this point - it tells us how the Soviet Union destroyed so much and how the flame from those times still lives strongly in Russia. I live in Finland next to Russia. The comic is divided in two sections, Ukrainian and Russian notebooks. The Ukrainian part is mostly about the great famine and what the Russians actually did to Ukraine during their rule. The Russian notebook then is mostly about Anna Politkovskaya, her murder and Chechnya. The reading experience is immense, scary and makes you feel ill. It's hard to believe what's happening in Russia

and what the Russians did not long ago, poor Chechen people. I can only compare this to Joe Sacco's Palestine and this is just as marvelous.

The art works very well with the story line and the structure works out too. There are some structural problems though, as in, the Russian part is a bit scattered compared to the Ukrainian one. It would've needed a better pacing mostly. Anna's role and the analyses of her deeds are definitely the best part as well as the Chechen disaster and the Ukrainian famine. The latter ones are hideous in nature. It doesn't matter that the comic isn't perfect, since it goes through stuff that's hard to depict and I congratulate Igor for being brave enough to do this. I hope we will get this in Finnish, even if Russia wouldn't approve that. That country has a tendency to interfere, but not let anyone else do the same to them. I'm not a big fan of Russia and now even less. Comics like this change the world. I highly recommend this.

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### **abby says**

This was my very first attempt at reading a graphic novel. It only took me a couple of pages to get accustomed to the format before I got sucked into the story. There are two parts to this graphic novel: the first set in Ukraine and largely focused on telling the stories of those who lived through the Holodomor genocide (a Stalin-made famine meant to punish Ukrainian insubordination); the second is focused on the human rights violations committed during the wars in Chechnya and the reporters who were assassinated for daring to write about it.

The material in the second half was more shocking to me, if only because it seems inconceivable that Nazi-era civilian war tactics are happening right under Western Civilization's nose. It is, of course, important to remember that the author/artist is not a journalist or a historian and only tells one side of the story.

The author/artist does a masterful job of bringing the story to life with his drawings. His drawings express the pain, the sadness, the hopelessness and the death in ways words can't always convey.

However, I found that the author bounced around a bit, and the timelines got a bit wonky. It was difficult to keep track of who was who and, at times, named persons appeared into the narrative with no explanation of who they were in relation to anything else going on.

\*I received an ARC of this title courtesy of the publisher and NetGalley

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### **Jim says**

These harrowing stories of life under Soviet rule. Stories of starvation. Of cannibalism. Living without any kind of healthcare - no doctor or medicine.

And the stark black and white art really lend to the feeling of emptiness that these men and women are reflecting on.

In the Ukraine Notebooks, it might have been nice to have more background about what was going on. Or maybe I should know the background.

And even the atrocities being committed in the 21st century during the Chechen wars as described in the Russian Notebooks. It's amazing what we can turn away from.

*Thanks to NetGalley and Simon & Schuster for a copy in return for an honest review.*

(This must be an early copy. There are some odd mistakes. Like page 39 has some odd formatting and stops in the middle of a word. And that's not the first page where a sentence just stops, but the next page starts a new sentence.)

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## **Olga says**

I received an ARC of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

This is an important work, asking questions that have no answers. Igort excels at bringing to life history, in this case it is the history of Ukraine and the USSR. I had no trouble reading a graphic novel of this size (more than three hundred pages), but I had trouble with the content. My main complaint is that there are no links to the sources. Igort wrote a non fiction book, non fiction graphic novel. And non fiction requires from an author to provide links to his sources.

When he describes interviews, I understand that the source is this exact person telling the story he or she remembers. But when Igort makes claims that Holodomor was artificially created in order to kill specifically Ukrainians, that sounds groundless. Why is that? Because if he cared to look up history books, he'd know that in 1932-33 not only Ukraine suffered from famine, but many other Soviet regions too. To name a few: Siberia, Volga region, Kazakhstan, Southern Ural and others. Yes, partly the famine was caused by the policy of the USSR against kulaks (rich peasants) and because of the USSR goal to export grain. But besides that it was caused by a combination of factors, including low harvest and increased demand for food because of an industrialisation (too many people moved to the cities, too few stayed to work the land).

It was a tragedy of several nations. Ukrainians has a specific word that means the famine was targeted specifically against them - Holodomor. That is their choice. But people in the other regions and of other nationalities died too. They killed and ate their babies. Because there was nothing to eat. They ate horse skin. They died. Not only Ukrainians, but Russians, Kazakhs and other nationalities. That's how stalinism worked. There was one great goal for everyone, to export as much grain as possible, and no one could simply say: Ha, I don't feel like doing it today. You had no choice. Not only in Ukrainian SSR, but everywhere else too.

I feel I'd like that part much more if Igort put more effort into making it more objective.

As for the second part, describing life and death of Anna Politkovskaya, I pretty much remember the times described. And I can say Igort painted more accurate picture than in the first part of the book. It pains me to admit, but journalists were killed in Russia because they wrote what they decided to write, not simply what was safe to write. Politkovskaya was one of those journalists.

She wrote about Chechnya and what happened there, describing all the atrocities of war. She reported what happened recently there and wrote books on what happened some time ago there. She was respected by many different people, but unfortunately her narrative didn't match the official one. The outcome was that she was killed in an elevator of her own home. Shot at four times, to be exact, including one shot at the head. The killers were quite professional.



What pains me even more to admit, is that these two books were written by Igort. Not because he is a foreigner painting more or less an objective picture of my fatherland. But because there are no such books in Russian. A nation wide tragedy called stalinism took place, and some people still can say things like 'Stalin won WWII and he did what he had to do! He was great!' When I hear something like that, said sometimes even by my friends or relatives, I am lost. I don't know how to respond. And my only hope can be that they don't know all the details.

Like, for example, they don't know about the famine of 1932-33, caused partially by Stalin's crazy goals. Or how many people perished in Gulag. In order for them to know that, there have to be books. Different books, painting different pictures, not the only picture in which Stalin is a great war strategist and a national leader.

Igort created such books, but where are books written by Russian authors? Sure, we have scientific historical works on specific topics, as the said famine. Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* contains about 1200 pages. Needless to say not many enthusiasts will plunge into the grim descriptions of the Soviet rule, extending for more than one thousand pages.

Graphic novels present a great opportunity to combine the power of a word with the power of a picture. I don't believe we would see in a near future any Russian artist/writer creating a graphic novel on the Gulag or stalinism. But maybe this is what we need. We need closure. We didn't have it when the USSR finally decomposed. That's why some people still believe in some mythical Stalin who did what he did for the good of every Soviet comrade. And books like Igort's help to dissolve this illusion.

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### **Jon(athan) Nakapalau says**

The 1932 Holodomor is looked at through first person interviews in the Ukrainian NB. The new Russia and the Chechen War are examined in the Russian NB. Igort connects the stories with stark art that makes you feel the oppression that permeates the subject matter...highest recommendation.

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### **Taryn says**

Graphic nonfiction featuring first-person accounts of the real-life horrors that occurred during the Ukrainian famine of 1932 and the recent conflict in Chechnya. Content warning: Graphic descriptions of brutality.

*"Maybe we'd like to share our secret, that secret called war, but those who live in peace have no interest in hearing it." - Anna Politkovskaya*

It was actually the subtitle rather than the title that caught my attention: *Life and Death Under Soviet Rule*. Author Anthony Marra's books have made me really interested in this region and its history. If you've ever read *Constellation of Vital Phenomena* or *The Tsar of Love and Techno*, you will find many of the situations in this book familiar. **This nonfiction book is bleaker than Marra's fictional works. There is no humor and there is very little hope, just survival. The glimmers of humanity are quickly extinguished.**

It was written and illustrated by Igort, an Italian comic author. It is 384 pages, but it only took a couple of hours to read since the pages are filled with artwork. **The artwork is effective and haunting.** The illustrations emphasize the reality of the events described. The drawing style and color palette suit the content; the published version is sepia-toned with selective splashes of black and saturated reds. You can get a good sense of the book by looking through the pages available on Google Books. **This book is a collection of survivor and witness testimony, historical records, and author reflections.** The historical information wasn't extremely in-depth, but it gave much-needed context to the interviews. **Igort's analysis and reflections made it obvious how deeply he cares about the subject.** The phrasing was a little awkward sometimes. I'm not sure if that was because of translation or a very conversational writing style.

*Human brutality sparks the imagination...*

**The content is divided into two sections: *The Ukrainian Notebook* and *The Russian Notebook*.** The organization of this book is a little scattered within its individual sections.\* **It really is structured like a notebook.** At times, it reminded me of a documentary in book form. My issues with the organization made it hard to have a complete understanding of the historical facts, but the individual elements are all very impressive. **I did not finish the book feeling that I could produce a coherent summary of historical facts, but I did finish it with a fuller understanding of the human impact. The most powerful (and horrifying) parts of this book are the personal accounts of the survivors.**

*One can adapt to anything. The patience of Ukrainian peasants is proverbial.*

***The Ukrainian Notebook* deals specifically with the situation in Ukraine during the late 1920s/early 1930s, with a focus on dekulakization and Holodomor (man-made famine).** The Kulaks (property owners) of Ukraine resisted collectivization. In retaliation, the Soviet government, led by Joseph Stalin, devised a regimented plan to obliterate the problem and remove them from their homeland.\* The situation became so desperate that cannibalism and necrophagy became commonplace. 131,409 individuals were deported. The Soviet campaign was successful and the Kulak population had been reduced from 5.6 million to 149,000 between the years of 1928 and 1934.

*Rage. It lashes out at life's little things.*

***The Russian Notebook* focuses on Russia in the 2000s and the Second Chechen War. The focal point of this section is Anna Politkovskaya, a journalist and human rights activist, who was assassinated near her Moscow apartment.** Anna was an inspiring woman and a vocal opponent of the Second Chechen War. I am always in awe of people who fight on behalf of others, despite the threats to their own survival. I admire those that are able to preserve their value system and their empathy for all people, even when they have seen the darkest of humanity. I thought this author description particularly chilling: "*the sense of oppression one feels in a place that only appears to be free, where the system depends on a cloak of indifference that can cover up any kind of crime without any punishment ever taking place.*" I could remember many of the events discussed in this book and the format helped me form a complete picture of the human beings behind the

events I saw on the evening news.

*Anna's was a better Russia, and perhaps what we have learned from her is the need to remember, to not turn a blind eye or look the other way, to not accept prepackaged truths but to defend everyday values no matter what, the values that make us, after all, human.*

**The author closes the book with a postscript that ties the events of 2014 (the Russian annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Ukraine) to the historical context he provided in the previous pages.** He tells the story of a Russian soldier, *"not an activist, not a troublemaker, simply a man who had made a decision. A just man who paid for his choice."* *The Ukrainian and Russian Notebooks* isn't easy subject matter; it is difficult to read what fellow humans have endured. It tells the stories of people who are most affected by the political decisions made in distant cities and who are doing the best they can to survive. It serves as a reminder that barbaric methods did not die with the past and how all the events of the past have a profound effect on the present and future. It gave me greater historical context for the fiction works I have already read and served as an introduction that encourages me to do further reading on the subject. I am adding *The Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* by Timothy Snyder to my "to read" list.

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**I received this copy from NetGalley and the publisher, in exchange for an honest review.**

\* The organization was sometimes hard for me to follow. On page 32: "This famine was intentionally provoked; the documents prove it." I expected to see an example of this, but all that followed were callously casual observations from officials. Further research led me to a Wikipedia summary of American historian Timothy Snyder's research, *Deliberate targeting of Ukrainians*. Three hundred pages later in section two, there is a part regarding the deportation of the Kulaks that would have made more sense with the proper time period in section one, rather than the proper country in section two. It also includes a telegram that seems to be some of the documentation mentioned on page 34. I think it may have been structured this way to tie the two notebooks and the events together, but the way it was done was confusing.

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## **Laura says**

This is not light reading. This is not fun and games. This book is deeply disturbing because although it is history, it is modern history and still going on, and still unchanged. Reading this book would be equivalent to reading about the concentration camps in Germany while it was still going on.

So, if you want to know what has happened, and is happening in Russia and the Ukraine, this is an excellent, well written book to explain the whole thing. There is old history, setting things up, there are written reports, as well as people the author has interviewed who remember things, like the famine under Stalin.

The first book is about the Ukraine. The second part is about Anna Politkovskaya who reported on some of the atrocities of modern day Russia.

Here is a sample page about the famine.

And here is a sample page about the murder of Anna.

If you know nothing about what human torture is like in Russian, and parts controlled by Russia; if you want to want to learn about recent Soviet and Russian history; and if you want to understand why these things are happening, this would be a very easy book to pick up.

I would not say it was a pleasure to read, because it was not. It was disturbing, dark and sad. However, sometimes that is how we have to learn about the world.

Thank you to Netgalley for supplying this book for an honest review.

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### **Stewart Tame says**

Wow. This was a difficult read, not in the sense of being hard to comprehend, but in the emotional impact. So much pain ... so much suffering ... so much death ... Igor's narrative jumps around a bit, telling stories in quick bursts. It helps keep the bleakness from being overwhelming. The artwork is lovely, reminiscent in some ways of the classic EC war comics. The sequence from page 276 to 281 where a young soldier is ordered to perform an execution is phenomenal. Artistically, this book is amazing. Narratively, it's harrowing. This is as it should be. Events such as these should be examined and documented and remembered, but should never become familiar or comfortable.

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### **Sandra says**

A harrowing account of the Holodomor, the Famine-Genocide in Ukraine in 1932 and 1933 and the murder of journalist and human rights activist Anna Politkovskaya are the two stories depicted in this graphic novel.

Because of Stalin's collectivization program, millions of people starved in the USSR, the Holodomor in the Ukraine alone has numbers cited from 3 to 7 million. Other estimations even run into the 10 million. There were several factors that contributed to these numbers. Low harvest, the massive export of grains by the USSR, the killing of livestock resulting in less food and available labor, and the deportations and executions of the peasants for fear of uprisings.

The book is designed in the form of a journal and recounts several accounts of eye witnesses as short vignettes, showing how they hid their grains, killed their horses, were evicted from their homes, even how cannibalism was a common occurrence.

In the second story, we learn of Anna Politkovskaya, a journalist who reported on Chechnya and even wrote several books about the atrocities there. This was not taken lightly and she received several death threats during her life. In 2006 she was murdered in the elevator of her flat.

The artwork was nicely done. Graphic and dark, you can feel the pain and sadness coming through. As you can only tell so much in a comic, the narrative was also at times hard to follow because of some continuity issues. It is however, a fantastic book. History in the form of a graphic novel makes it quite interesting to actually read up on a topic.

*Review copy supplied by publisher through NetGalley in exchange for a rating and/or review.*

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