



## Fables, Vol. 1: Legends in Exile

*Bill Willingham (Writer) , Lan Medina (Artist) , Steve Leialoha (Artist) , Craig Hamilton (Artist) , James Jean (Cover Artist)*

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When a savage creature known only as the Adversary conquered the fabled lands of legends and fairy tales, all of the infamous inhabitants of folklore were forced into exile. Disguised among the normal citizens of modern-day New York, these magical characters have created their own peaceful and secret society within an exclusive luxury apartment building called Fabletown. But when Snow White's party-girl sister, Rose Red, is apparently murdered, it is up to Fabletown's sheriff, a reformed and pardoned Big Bad Wolf (Bigby Wolf), to determine if the killer is Bluebeard, Rose's ex-lover and notorious wife killer, or Jack, her current live-in boyfriend and former beanstalk-climber.

**Collecting:** *Fables* 1-5

## **Fables, Vol. 1: Legends in Exile Details**

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## **From Reader Review Fables, Vol. 1: Legends in Exile for online ebook**

### **Hershey says**

Welcome, queer folk of the modern age, welcome!

The queer folk of the Fabled lands of legends are now living as exiles in your very queer world indeed and they seem to have adapted very well by creating this very secret society called Fabletown. Oh, don't bother looking for them for you will never recognize them.

From wearing pretty gowns and armour, from fighting against evil and saving princesses, these folks have changed tremendously. They have lost their touch with magic and true love for your world is very corrupt indeed. Like I said, you wouldn't even recognize them.

But then, you find this book. You pick it up for some light reading. And just like that, you're sucked into their new world in your world. You come to know secrets and shocking revelations and at times, how sexy your once favourite characters have become.

But right now, in this particular volume, you realize that Snow White's sister Rose Red is missing. 'Oh dear' you might exclaim or you might just roll your eyes or you might taken it upon yourself to find her and get inside this secret society. Good luck, queer person! You won't be fast enough.

Snow White and the Big Bad Wolf team up to find her sister and what a team they make! Don't be alarmed, queer person, the Big Bad Wolf is now the Sheriff of this secret society and he's now a very good wolf indeed.

And thus, you are pulled inside this story, lost inside this story and finally, yearning for more tales from this very secret society. Or are they just tales, queer folk of the modern age? Keep your eyes wide open for a fair maiden with a sword up her sleeve, a grumpy looking Sheriff, a red haired vixen, handsome charming men and folks with elvish appearances and also if you have acquired this wonderful first volume, I suggest you start your hunt for the next one!

Until next time, queer folk of the modern age!

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### **Irmak says**

Çok güzeldi ya :')

Masal kahramanlar?n bir araya toplanmas? çok ho?uma gitti. Once Upon A Time özledi?imi fark ettim okurken :D

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## **James DeSantis says**

Years ago I tried to read Fables. I believe I got to volume 4 or so. Not bad or anything just didn't connect. Years later I'm trying once more. Results? Better but still lacking.

So if you don't know Fables, well where the fuck do you live? It's one of the biggest comics ever created, spanning over 20 volumes giving you a massive amount of storylines featuring some of the biggest named fairy tale character's ever created. In the first volume Snow White's sister goes missing. Bigby (The wolf from little red riding hood/3 pigs) is the detective for these fairy tale people and begins to hunt down who could have done this.

This main story really focuses on building the world here. Giving us a wide range of different characters, and even at that, feels like it's just peeking into the top of it all. By the end we figure out one case, but you know there's a lot more coming.

**Good:** The art is really solid. It also boasts some colorful and fun characters. The pacing isn't half bad either giving you a solid mystery that makes you wonder who could have done it. Also Bigby and Snow White are great.

**Bad:** Some of it is overwhelming, and the characters presented feel like you should know them before you do. Also the characters seem a little typical on their tropes they are given before this story based on their fantasies.

Overall this is a solid introduction. I'm hoping I fall in love with later volumes like many here have. If not at least I gave it a second go. A 3 out of 5.

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## **Karlyflower \*The Vampire Ninja, Luminescent Monster & Wendigo Nerd Goddess of Canada (according to The Hulk)\* says**

### **3 Stars**

So this Graphic Novel was very reminiscent of 'Once Upon a Time' for me. Our fairy tale creatures have been thrown into modern-day world and basically just have to deal with it... Awesome!! I love that shit.

Beyond being our introduction to the characters within the world, and some personalities that maybe don't exactly meet expectations, this first volume is a murder mystery.

Rose Red has disappeared, leaving behind an apartment splattered with blood and a big old mess.

Our unlikely Sherlock and Holmes Duo is B. Wolfe and Snow. This volume was so much fun, guys!! I thoroughly enjoyed getting to see how all these characters were getting on in the big, wide world of norms.

**Everyone:** Dude, what's with the three stars then??

**Vampire Ninja:** I didn't care for the art, at all. \*shrugs\*

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## **Joy says**

### *NO MORE HAPPILY EVER AFTER*

When I first picked up this graphic novel, the only thought running through my head was IT'S A GRAPHIC NOVEL FORM OF THE TV SERIES GRIMM OH MY GOD I'M SO PUMPED!!!

Turns out this was nothing like the tv series Grimm, but I still loved every bit of it anyway.

First of all, the backstory of the "Fables" is ingenious! Basically, all the fairy tales and magical creatures were living somewhat happily but divided in their "Homeland," but then this mysterious enemy called "The Adversary" came and picked them all off one by one. The few who survived created "Fabletown" and the "Farm" in the human world so that they could all live peacefully away from The Adversary, and that's where they've been for centuries. Now, we follow the Big Bad (reformed) Wolf and Snow White as they try to figure out all the crazy mystery, crime and drama that happens among the magical people in Fabletown and the Farm.

The artwork in this volume is simply stunning. Every character is expertly drawn and colored, and in a way that makes their features realistic and expressions relatable. In my opinion, the best parts about the art were the accents, borders and backgrounds because they really set the stage for a fairy tale-esque story. Well, a *really twisted* fairy tale-esque story.

Which brings me to the lovely characters. Right from the beginning, every character completely blew away any assumptions I had going into this book. Actually, I was really imagining something dark and Grimm-like and some standard princesses, princes, creatures, etc. before diving in, so I was pleasantly surprised by how bright and lively the characters and panels were. I loved how a lot of the most well-known fairy tale characters had very unexpected personalities like Prince Charming is a poor womanizer who sponged off of every girl he met then slept with while Snow White is the assistant deputy mayor. I also loved reading about how the magical-ness of pairings like the Beauty and the Beast translated to their actual physical appearances and feelings and such.

Definitely a must read! I recommend the first volume of *Fables* to lovers of suspense, scandals and badass fairy tales. 4.5

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## **? Sh3lly - Grumpy Name-Changing Wanderer ? says**

This seems like a solid start to a series. The fairy tale characters' homeland has been taken over by an enemy called The Adversary and have fled to the mundane world we live in. Snow White is a politician who works for the Mayor, King Cole, and The Big Bad Wolf is the sheriff.

Snow White's sister, Rose Red, has apparently been murdered and the crime must be solved. The solving of the crime and big reveal wasn't really anything special, but there is a great premise set up with a lot of potential. The characters we have all heard of are tweaked and often the result is really funny.

I think my favorite line was with Pinocchio. He's at the Fabletown yearly gala and complains about having to always come to the ball because he's looking for the fairy who turned him into a real boy:

*I'm over three centuries old and I still haven't gone through puberty. I want to grow up, I want my balls to drop, and I want to get laid."*

HAHA

Rose Red, the party girl:

Bluebeard, who spars with Cinderella in one scene:

Prince Charming is a mooching womanizer:

Overall, I enjoyed this and plan to continue.

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### **Cyndi says**

Excellent! The characters of fables have been forced to leave their enchanted lands and are living among us. In this story the wolf of three little pigs fame is a detective in human form. He is called to investigate what looks like the murder of Rose Red, sister to Snow White.

Great art work and writing. Loved all the fairy tale characters! ?

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### **Crystal says**

Why am I just starting to read these? They are awesome

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### **J.G. Keely says**

I remember being somewhat taken aback the first time I read an original Fairy Tale. They aren't child-friendly, in fact many of them were written to unnerve and frighten children. The characters in fairytales are usually half-mad, murderous, sexually-charged, and grotesque.

Authors have returned to them again and again for inspiration, exploring the history of storytelling,

moralizing tales, propaganda, and archetypes. Gaiman's 'Sandman' is notable for some remarkable insights into the nature of fairy tales and how they comment on what has changed in our modern storytelling tradition--and what hasn't. Likewise Mignola has recalled to us some of the less pleasant aspects of fairy stories in 'Hellboy', where the madness of these myths is hardly forgotten.

Hellboy was a decade before Fables, and Sandman twenty years before, but Fables is, if anything, a regression, doing less with myth than earlier comics. Names are dropped, but the characters attached neither typify nor subvert the characters they are aping. In the end, Willingham portrays a less nuanced take on the original myth than the average Disney movie.

His dialogue is wooden, lacking in subtlety or thrust. The characters say what you would expect them to, with plenty of awkward exposition:

*"Todd, my brother, what are you doing here at the government headquarters when you should be searching for your lost wife?"*

There's no style or charm to be found in the writing and the characters show none of the grotesque vividness of their sources.

Willingham seems unable to imagine a larger world than the one directly implied by his plot, which is a straightforward murder-mystery. His setting has all the depth of a painted backdrop. If he had hoped to achieve a sliver of what Gaiman did with old myths, he should have delved deeper into his source materials.

His interweaving is clumsy, with the suggestion that Oz and 'The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe' are part of his fairytale tradition. This inclusion conflicts with the backstory, since both were written after the fables were ousted from fairy land and relocated to America (the result of a war with Satan in a flashback swiped from 'The Lord of The Rings' Films).

The art is workmanlike, often as wooden and simplified as the dialogue. It tells the story with little flair or movement. Characters are successfully reproduced, but not explored or played with. Most of the frames are closeups of people talking, and the rest are mid-range bird's eye group shots. It's all yawningly safe. The color palate shows little variance or mood, more 'Jughead Digest' than Vertigo, and lacking even the lurid appeal of a 4-color.

Once again I'm haunted by the phrase "it gets better!", which is all the more maddening because in a tiny fraction of cases, it proves to be true. Unfortunately, the next two volumes don't get much better, though with practice, the dull, awkward storytelling does get more streamlined, which is kind of like a bad restaurant which puts out fliers to announce that it now has delivery service.

Mediocrity is one of the few things made worse by improving its convenience.

I usually save one-star reviews for books that were overtly insulting or stupid, but this one gets it purely on uninspired dullness. I tried reading it when it first came out, and couldn't get through it. After hearing all the praise more recently, I tried again. I'm not going to be one of those who says that comics used to be better and suck now, I know there must be good comics out right now, but they can be hard to find. I'm back to looking, it seems.

## **My Suggested Readings in Comics**

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## **Lyn says**

Legends in Exile by Bill Willingham and a team of illustrators begin the Fables series of adult graphic novels.

This is a very imaginative extension of fables such as Snow White, Old King Cole, the big bad wolf, Jack and the Beanstalk, etc. The idea is that the fables were exiled from their home lands by a common enemy, The Adversary, and relocated to New York but maintained a community of exiles called Fable Town.

Very entertaining and creative. One of the best scenes is a self-pitying monologue by Pinocchio.

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## **Meredith Holley says**

I was told this would be funny . . .

???

Maybe to some people character soup is funny on its own without any kind of actual cleverness? It seems like a pretty lazy form of humor, though, if that is actually humor. Is that humor???

THIS IS A MYSTERY, not a comedy. And a somewhat lame mystery without any comedic elements I could identify. I mean, I haven't been that big of a fan of mystery story since I was like 10 and read most of the Agatha Christies. I think that was the same year I ate a tuna fish sandwich almost every day. I learned my overdose lesson for the most part that year, but I still gag a little when I smell tuna. And I lost the suspense you're supposed to have at a mystery. It got replaced with boredom. But, also, this was a REALLY obvious mystery.

I like mysteries like Gaudy Night or the Sarah Caudwells, where it's more about the story than the mystery. Those are great. I have a slight sense that this was supposed to be about the characters, too, but that didn't make it enjoyable to me. I don't get this thing of taking fairy tales and going, "What if we made all of the characters super unpleasant?! People will love it!" Why? I mean, I guess there is a sort of a Dina Goldstein motivation of saying, this is how fairy tales work out in real life.

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But, Dina Goldstein is a goddess of concise, poignant visual impact. This story just didn't have the same immediate resonance, and I don't necessarily think it was trying for that. It mostly just seemed like it was going for making characters unpleasant, not necessarily more realistic. It floundered, and then in the end it seemed to somehow have actually been mostly about how (view spoiler). I don't get it, and whatever it is, it was not funny. It was totally not horrible, though.

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## **Calista says**

Rose red and Snow White are sisters. They have been chased out of their own lands into our world to survive. They they must live among us. The big bad wolf is the detective of the story. This is a who-dunnit story and it's good. We are meeting all the characters and the world they created among the mundy's who don't know they exist.

I don't think the art is anything special and I really enjoy the story. The art gets the job done. I hope they keep adding characters for this. They are combing all of the fable stories, modern and antique. The wizard of Oz is references as it Aslan, so anything that is fantasy is fair game here.

I will be reading more of this series.

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## **Emily May says**

I'd been wondering why lately I've had such bad luck with books. Almost everything I picked up went back down again and more than half of what I read through and reviewed was a disappointment. After reading this first volume of the Fables series, it hit me all of a sudden - Tatiana. Or lack of Tatiana and her excellent book-recommending skills. Thanks for the rec, T, I knew you'd get it right ^\_^

The Fables series has been one I've wanted to start since I first heard of it. Adult retellings of classic fairytales with a few touches of sex, violence and humour? SOLD! However, I talked myself out of it about a year ago when I foolishly picked up a random volume - nine, I believe - and didn't get it at all. Perhaps volume nine happens to be a bad apple in an otherwise excellent bunch, or perhaps that particular volume wasn't made to be read as a standalone (IMO, the first three can be enjoyed individually), whatever the reason, I found myself putting off a series which I'd previously been certain I'd love. I've learned my lesson and am now breezing through these fantastic volumes (I'll be starting number four soon) and becoming more and more addicted to the characters, the world and the humour.

Will you enjoy this? Personally, I think it depends on whether the humour is your cup of tea. I also don't believe it would be fair to sell this series as merely a comedy; each volume is very different, some are darker and gorier than others, some are primarily mysteries, others not so much. But the humour is behind it all and is what, for me, turns this into something more than a regular urban fantasy, fairytale retelling. It's what makes these characters memorable and there's not much I like more than a funny villain - everyone has a sense of humour here. I, for one, am finding it more and more funny with every installment I read.

Another thing is the artwork, which I like a lot in this series. The art has to receive a mention when you're reading a graphic novel because it inevitably affects how you read the story and how you view the characters. I tend to prefer realistic drawings, as opposed to arty, scrawly messes that are supposed to set some kind of tone. Give me this instead any day:

This first volume opens with the discovery of Rose Red's destroyed apartment. The place has been turned on its head and blood is splattered on every surface. Bigby Wolf and Snow White must investigate... can all that blood really be Rose Red's? Is she dead? Who would have a reason to hurt her? This first story is enjoyable

and, in my opinion, they just keep getting better.

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I just want to take this opportunity to also recommend the TV show Once Upon A Time. Originally, they were planning to make a show out of Fables but they modified it a bit and Once Upon A Time came out the other end. And it's a favourite of mine - you should check it out!

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### **Felicia says**

Lovely lovely lovely.

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### **destiny ? howling libraries says**

I positively love fairytale retellings, so friends have been recommending this series of graphic novels to me for quite a while, and I finally decided to pick up the first two volumes from the library. I wasn't sure at first how much I would enjoy it, as it's drawn in a very "comic"-esque art style, which I'm usually not a big fan of (I typically prefer more artsy styles, circa the *Saga* or *Monstress* series). That said, this was a really fun read, and I loved how many classic characters were represented.

Volume 1 follows Wolf, who is a detective investigating the case of Rose Red's apparent death, as her sister, Snow White, tags along. None of the details really match up, so Wolf and Snow are forced to investigate everyone they can as they seek out the truth behind her sudden disappearance. I normally am not big on whodunits because too many years of watching *CSI*, *Law & Order*, *NCIS*, etc. has brought me to a point in my life where I'm rarely surprised, and it tends to put a damper on things, but I actually didn't peg the ending of this one! I was pleasantly surprised and now I'm looking forward to continuing the series soon.

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### **Jess ✶Harbinger of Blood-Soaked Rainbows✶ says**

Because Gibbsy said so.....

I paid good money for these Gibbsy. You and your pasty skin better hope you didn't steer me wrong.

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Luckily, for Gibbsy and all his friends acolytes, he will not be meeting an untimely demise via shrimp death.

Because I really liked this book.

The art is some of the most stunning art I have ever come across. And I'm not talking about Lan Medina's drawings which tell the story, though it was amazeballs too. I'm talking about James Jean's gorgeous works of art which separate the individual issues. Artwork which I want in poster form, on my bedroom wall.

This volume was a tiny bit lacking in the characterization department, but overall I was very entertained the whole way through and I zipped through this thing. I enjoyed reading about the specific characters and how their lives have shifted since their happily ever afters. Fairy tale legends live alongside regular New Yorkers (called Mundanes) ever since their kingdom was destroyed by an unknown and faceless enemy called The Adversary. It was kinda like a darker, better written this:

But without the angst. And the plotholes. And the crazy convoluted plots that didn't make sense. And DEFINITELY without these two.

Who (spoiler alert) completely ruined the show for me.

Anywhoo, these characters know about their magic, know about their homeland. Most of them lost their kingdoms and their riches and their titles and now have to figure out a way to live among us normal folk. Snow White is the mayor and the Big Bad Wolf is the sheriff. And that's all fine and dandy because after their worlds were destroyed, there was this great big **grand amnesty** thing and all the past crimes were forgiven, and in light of working together against the adversary, villains became heroes. And some heroes became villains.

Or maybe heroes and villains embody various shades of gray. That's better anyway.

Snow White's sister, Rose Red, appears to have been murdered, and the big bad wolf (otherwise known as Bigby) is on the case. Snow insists on tagging along. These two reminded me a bit of

Except Snow was a little bit more on the melodramatic side rather than the cute quirky side. She cried all the time. Like every other frame. It got on my nerves.

And like EVERY fairytale couple is divorced. Snow and Charming, Cinderella and her prince. The only ones who seem to be giving it a good run are beauty and the beast. And even they are far from the couple of the year.

I enjoyed the stellar storytelling chops from Willingham but also from the artist Lan Medina. A lot. I enjoyed the subtle hints into their true natures.

I also enjoyed much of the humor strewn throughout. It made me laugh.

I also enjoyed the needed bit of backstory we got into what really happened at The Homeland.

Poor little piggies. They never seem to catch a break.

The thing lacking for me was there wasn't really a character I liked all that much. Bigby has some potential, as does Bluebeard, but really, I found a lot of them shallow and whiny and pretentious. I'm hoping that future volumes can flesh out individual backstories because I want more.

So Gibbs shall live to see the sun rise and fall at least one more time. But I still have two more volumes to read before I make any decisions. I'm still watching you Gibbsy.

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### **Melki says**

This was a pretty fun read, though since the premise was better than the execution, my rating is actually a 3.5.

Fairy tale and nursery rhyme characters are forced to make it in the big city after their worlds are overthrown by the mysterious "Adversary". Bigby Wolf owns a detective agency and he's hired by Snow White to investigate the disappearance of her sister, Rose Red. In this tale meant strictly for grown-ups, Jack, of Beanstalk fame, is quite the social climber, and Prince Charming turns out to be a real heel.

There'll be no happily ever afters for this bunch.

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### **Norah Una Sumner says**

#### **3.5 stars**

Such an interesting and fun concept! I definitely enjoyed reading this volume which represents the perfect introduction to this story's characters and the world they live in. This volume is like one big investigation and I really enjoyed trying to figure out what happened to Rose Red. Also, Snow White is a bad ass. Love her. Looking forward to reading the sequel!

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### **Trish says**

Since I'm a huge fan of fairytales from all over the globe, it was just a matter of time before I started this charming comic series about a number of fairytale characters living in our world in exile after some "adversary" took their kingdoms (yes, all of them, one after another).

This first volume introduces us to the colourful and diverse community they have established which is basically run by Snow White. The day-to-day routine is interrupted when one of the Fables, as they call themselves, is murdered.

The set-up with the Big Bad Wolf as Fabletown's sheriff is very well done and I like Bigby very much (yes, especially his wolf form ;P). Snow White as a clever, snarky, independent woman running the government was quite nice as well.

Other than that, there were quite a lot of chuckle-worthy situations and the play with fairytale tropes and potential what-happened-afterwards was cleverly done (although some are sad of course, no matter how predictable they were). Moreover, I'm a sucker for murder mysteries. Always have been. So the combination was just one more thing to draw me in. Throughout the entire tale I was therefore very well entertained although I figured out the murder mystery pretty early on.

The art is very pretty too, colourful but not chaotic, rich with detail. So the book is witty and fun and beautiful and I will definitely continue this series (the printed versions since they will look lovely on my

shelf).

As a side note, and this has nothing to do with this comic or my rating of it, I'm just saying: Snow White is NOT the sister of Rose Red. The fairytale is called Schneeweißchen und Rosenrot. Rosenrot is Rose Red and "wittchen" (from Schneewittchen) is an old version of "weißchen" which is a belittlement of weiß (white), but Schneeweißchen is not the English Snow White. In the respective fairytales, Snow White was the only daughter of a King and Queen, while Schneeweißchen und Rosenrot are sisters from a normal family that meet a bear and help him - the bear turning out to be a prince, marrying Schneeweißchen while Rosenrot marries the prince's younger brother.

I don't know if there is no distinction in the English language because of the names, but just so you know. ;)  
\*end of know-it-all mode\*

And another side-note:

Other than that, I discovered a character I don't actually know about (Boy Blue?) so my research begins. :)

P.S.: I had to grin like a loony when reading the name Grimble - Sean? xD

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### **Seth T. says**

Fractured faery tales and contemporary reimaginings of the classic fables have proliferated over the last several decades. Perhaps marked by the playfulness of postmodern revisit, traditional narratives have seemed a ripe harvest for gleaning new meaning from old stock. So with Bill Willingham and Mark Buckingham's *Fables*, we can't really find ourselves wowed by the ingenuity of exploring third-millennium expressions of old yarns—after all, it's not as if it hasn't been done often and recently. Still, since *Fables* is a wonderful series, its charms must lie elsewhere from the bland ingenuity of simply traveling well-trod roads.

*Fables* is, plainly stated, a wonderful series. It does indeed follow the figures of numerous traditional faery tales, fables, nursery rhymes, and best-beloved stories. It does indeed give them modern lives. And it does indeed attempt to interpret their predilections through a number of contemporary filters. Its successes in these reinterpretations are varied, with some faring better with some readers than with others—there have been some understandable frustrations with the fates, expressions, and motivations of both female and male characters, depending on what a reader brings to the text.

*Fables* works well not just as Story As Story, but as a commentary on the contemporary reader. Obviously, the work says many things about its creators, but just as interesting are the reactions it provokes in its readership—whether joy or frustration or pleasure or groans or interest or rage. When embedded fans of the series will devote their time and energy to incisive critique and critical readings, that is the mark of a worthwhile read.

Some readers take issue with some of Willingham's female characters and their sometimes provincial outlook on life and on male/female natures and interactions. Others find the portrayal of Arabian fables to be stereotyped and representative of the book's missed opportunities. Others boggle at the treatment of contemporary political matters, whether the abortion question or Israeli foreign policy. It is a powerful work that can elicit such responses from its mature readership and still garner praise from many of its detractors.

*Fables*' foundation is built on the idea that all the faery tales and nursery rhymes that have been expressed over the centuries in our world are somehow reflections on a multitude of very real other worlds. Worlds in which Snow White and Rose Red live and breathe. Worlds in which the Big Bad Wolf roams around large and hungry. Worlds in which Boy Blue, Red Riding Hood, Beauty and her Beast, Pinocchio, and more each have full lives only hinted at in our own versions of their stories. And circumstances being what they were, these auspicious figures were forced to evacuate their fabled realms and flee here, to the mundane world.

Because a grave and merciless Adversary had begun conquering their lands one after another, the fables found themselves escaped to 1600s Europe from where they then made passage to the New World. There, they established in New Amsterdam an enclave they call Fabletown. Protected by numerous spells and wards, Fabletown sits undiscovered in the midst of the growing New York City—and that is where Willingham first deposits the reader, four hundred years later. The fables have grown comfortable in their adopted homeland, leading relatively normal lives and holding jobs. Of course things are more complicated than that, but that is our introduction to what turns out to be a collection of indelible characters.

Characterization is one of *Fables*' three main strong points. Each fable has his or her or its surface story, the one that may be an amusing take on the legend. Pinocchio is an embittered 400-year-old in the body of a ten-year-old boy. Kind of like Edward Cullen but with a lot less sex. Beast is human most of the time, but begins falling back into his monstrous appearance as his wife's love for him wanes. Goldilocks, married to Baby Bear, is an activist for interspecies marriage. Prince Charming, having wed Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty is known as the town cad. Amusing, sure, but not much beyond that. And if that was where Willingham left his characters, *Fables* would grow stale at a rapid clip.

Fortunately, the stories and backstories of these fables pretty quickly begin to show some depth and thought. These are full-bodied individuals whose motives and actions begin to make sense through the perpetual revelation of who they really are. No character remains mere stereotype. And with a single exception (due to personal taste), each of these characters have become dear to me.

The second strength of the series is its seemingly endless well of narrative ideas. Willingham continues to bring new and fresh developments to this company of fables and seems to actively eschew any sort of status quo. The series just hit its 100th chapter and Willingham shows no evident signs of flagging. After what seemed to be his first-act climax, I couldn't be sure where he would take the story. It seemed as if, having wrapped up what probably could have been the series-long conflict, he didn't have much elsewhere to go and yet even now, we're seeing new story branches and hints of developments to come. I continue to anticipate a long and fruitful series.

The other great strength of *Fables* is its art. And while the seventy or so James Jean-painted covers are a mighty beauty to behold, it is Mark Buckingham's interior design work and character drawing that really pulls the series together. While many of the guest artists do well with what they're given, I am always thirsty for the series to return to Buckingham's hands. His art is not flashy in the overly detailed sense that has sometimes been a boon but mostly plagued mainstream books for the last two decades. He is steady and inventive and illustrates these fables with power and grace.

Personally, this is one of my favorite books to pick up every time a new collected volume comes out. I anticipate each new arch in the story and am rarely let down. In sixteen volumes (and one prose novel), the

book has only been Not Good twice (individual reader frustrations over socio-political matters aside). Unfortunately, one of those books is the reason I have a hard time recommending the series.

Because it's the very first book.

It's pretty aggravating, but the first volume of this otherwise wonderful series—the one in which all the principal characters are introduced—is really just a mediocre book. It holds none of the charm of the later series. Essentially, whenever I do recommend the series (as I am doing now), I have to caveat by saying: “No matter what you think of the first volume, keep going and read the second one. And then the third. It just gets better and better.” Really, the next rough patch doesn’t crop up until volume thirteen,\* so that’s a pretty good spread.

In any case, if you’re a mature reader, I highly recommend *Fables* as an entertaining, thoughtful exploration of characters with whom you’re likely familiar in circumstances that are new and fresh.

**Notes:**

\* I know. Others will point to the Arabian fables volume. Or the Wedding. Or any number of other points that illustrate issues that one may take up they interpret the book. And that's fair. But, those are judgments on volumes based on personal values, not on the merits of comic-craft and storytelling. Volume thirteen is objectively Not Good,\*\* whether one takes issue with any socio-political matters contained therein or not.

\*\* Insofar as anything in the realm of deciding whether or not you like a comic book can actually be considered objectively.

[review courtesy of Good Ok Bad]

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