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When cardboard creatures come magically to life, a boy must save his town from disaster.

Cam's down-and-out father gives him a cardboard box for his birthday and he knows it's the worst present ever. So to make the best of a bad situation, they bend the cardboard into a man-and to their astonishment, it comes magically to life. But the neighborhood bully, Marcus, warps the powerful cardboard into his own evil creations that threaten to destroy them all!

Cardboard Details

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From Reader Review Cardboard for online ebook

Angela says

Mike is an out-of-work carpenter and a widower with a young teen son, Cam. When Mike can't afford a birthday present for Cam, he encounters a strange toy salesman who offers him a cardboard box for under a dollar. The man gives Mike some rules: he has to return any unused cardboard and he can't have more.

Mike and Cam make a boxer out of the cardboard, and the boxer comes to life. "Bill" and Cam are fast friends, but when Cam's wealthy and mean-spirited neighbor Marcus decides he wants magic cardboard, too, things quickly get out of control.

Cardboard is visually appealing with Tennapel's unique style and bright colors. Aimed at the middle grades, there are strong themes of right/wrong and decision making, but they were obvious and direct. While it's good for a younger audience, it could annoy older readers. I liked Mike—he's a strong father figure, which is rare in stories for younger people. He's not perfect, and he has his own issues to deal with, but he puts his son first.

The story switches focus halfway through—it's no longer about Cam and his dad, but about Marcus and why he's such a bully. It was here that the obvious moralizing got to be too much for me. I also felt that the characters were stereotypical—evil Marcus is a long-haired Marilyn Manson lookalike, honest Mike is a muscular, good-looking guy, etc. The overall story actually reminded me of the "Goofus and Gallant" cartoons in Boy's Life.

- No language or sexual issues
- Marcus has a pet rat that he is constantly putting in harm's way. I felt like I was supposed to be mildly amused by these scenes. The rat, Fang, always comes out unscathed, and Marcus's obliviousness to the well-being of his pet characterizes him as a callous jerk. However, this problematic behavior doesn't change.
- There's some gross-factor to this book. Marcus has a friend named Pink Eye whose eyes are red and infected.
- The violence in the story involves cardboard people and monsters. Although they're made out of cardboard, the reader will empathize with cardboard Bill—if he's sentient, then aren't the others? So while the war is against "cardboard," it's hard to separate the "what's alive?" element.
- There are fist fights and weapons. The weapons are made out of the magic cardboard and only injure cardboard creatures.

Emily says

I liked it, it wasn't the best book I've read, but it was good. I have definitely read better Graphic Novels.

Zaniya Carter- says

I love it

Melissa Chung says

5 stars! It was great. I loved pretty much everything about it.

Cardboard is about a down in luck dad named Mike. His wife has passed away and he is trying to raise his son Cam all alone. He is also between jobs and no one is hiring. A sad start to any story. It's his son's birthday and he wants to buy him something great but he can't afford anything. Mike sees a stand on the side of the road selling cheap toys. The man, Mr. Gideon, learns that Mike's son Cam is a really good boy and so he sells Mike a cardboard box for 78 cents. This box, Mr. Gideon says, can be made into anything as long as you use your imagination.

It turns out Cam is a really good kid and when Mike comes home with the box Cam is excited. They build a boxer out of the box and the box boxer comes to life! They name the boxer Bill and the story goes from there.

I would say this graphic novel is kind of a Pinocchio re-telling and you'll know what I mean at the end. Great story about father and son. Friendship. Helping others even though you don't believe they deserve it. Working together. Magic! Loved it all around.

Kent R. says

The book is great because I really liked how it was written and the conflict that was made by the author. I really like how the dad got him a box and the son was fine with it and they made it into a boxer, after they slept the cardboard became alive and it was mesmerizing that he became alive. I would recommend this to 8 graders and below because it is a picture book and I don't think every one likes it.

Charles Hatfield says

I'd say Doug TenNapel is a sure bet: everything I've read by him (admittedly only a sliver of everything he's done) is smart, brisk, accessible, and graced with enticing high concepts and obvious emotional hooks. He writes cartoons with brio, he's prolific and seemingly always on full boil (what, about a graphic novel a year?), and so I have to believe he loves his work. *Cardboard*, a broad, eager, winning fantasy, is his latest, and takes off like a rocket from a simple, tantalizing premise: a widower and his young son stumble on some magical cardboard that can be used to bring to life creatures of their own making; chaos results! I had fun reading it.

As I read *Cardboard*, I thought, "This could be a Pixar movie. Or Laika." That's what it reads like, and almost everything filmmakers would need script-wise is already here: every major character has a problem or want and gets to exhibit change (i.e. everybody's got an arc); the initial premise spirals out of control into a series of set pieces that look good on paper and could look great on screen; the plot forks into alternating character bits that could be cross-cut in a movie for maximum suspense's sake; and there's a tender father/son pairing at the heart of it. Plus the grieving widower whose inability to move on in life calls to mind *Finding Nemo*. Characters that seem broadly drawn at first, such as a truly dislikable neighborhood punk, get peeled back, softened up, and rounded, yet TenNapel doesn't get so sentimental that he forgets to keep on delivering

little narrative shocks right up to the end (his inventiveness is in high gear). And reading the book is a breeze: varied layouts and elastic pacing carry the story effortlessly, and, man, TenNapel really cracks the whip.

So, a charming gust of a book, whirlwind-quick, and eager to please: an impressive workout with craft to spare. Yet I find myself wishing that TenNapel's character arcs and themes weren't so obvious. There's something programmed about them, like the over-familiar dramatic riffs in so many movies. You know, stuff that sounds as if it were dreamed up around a conference table: this character will undergo a big Change and resolve his Issues, et cetera. It all reeks of Screenwriting 101.

On the other hand, it *does* work. I mean, TenNapel does follow through; he doesn't forget his characters or shortchange them; he seeks to deliver a Well-Wrought Tale where nothing is wasted. And he does.

The book's best scene, for my money, is when Bill the Boxer (the first of the many cardboard critters brought to life in the story) wonders aloud about what part of him is cardboard and what part isn't, and whether he has a spirit that sets him apart from other, unliving cardboard things. This scene is basically about the question of soul versus body, and may be a hint of TenNapel's religious convictions, which do crop up in his work. I liked the way it worked here, lending heft and sweetness to a goofy idea.

Jordan Stephens says

Another great story from Doug TenNapel! Nothing too fancy, just good storytelling. One his strengths is his ability to keep the story from slowing down. The characters interplay with each other very well, and the story has a type of efficiency in the pacing that makes it easy to read. The art is vibrant and colorful, which adds to it nicely. There are a couple touching moments, but mostly the book is what I think the author intended for it to be- light, fun, easy, and enjoyable.

4/5

Laura says

Every page in Doug TenNapel's Cardboard pops to life with color, action, imagination, and heart!

Cam and his Dad are going through a rough time. Both trying to find a way to live without Cam's mother. Loneliness, grief, and fear show up throughout the story in heartbreaking quiet ways and not so subtle ways. Add no job, financial woes, bully troubles, and a birthday—well these guys have their hands full! Cam's father needs a miracle or a bit of magic to afford a gift for his son's birthday. And magic is just what he finds in a cardboard box. Magic and trouble! Father and son twist, bend, and build people out of the cardboard. People that come to life. And that's where the trouble begins...

Strong father and son messages color and fill these pages. Fathers trying to find a way to communicate and bond with their sons. (view spoiler) I loved Cam and his father's banter and relationship, but about half way through, the story seemed to shift more towards understanding Marcus—the neighborhood bully. To be honest, I really didn't like Marcus. His eyes gave me the creeps. Huge pools of creepiness! I realize that isn't

the greatest reason to dislike a character, but it's the truth. Haha...Plus I may have overdosed on the sad, misunderstood bully characters and tales lately. I wished the focus and spotlight had remained on Cam and his Dad.

This comic book is built around a brilliant idea! Cardboard people and monsters that come to life! Love it! But it had a few bumps for me. We never truly learn why or how the cardboard comes to life or any concrete reasoning behind the rules of the box. I'm all for mystery and magic--sometimes not knowing fills a story with wonder and power. But here it just felt a bit lazy leaving so many unanswered questions.

A fun adventure packed with action that will find an audience. But for me, this tale lost its bite and magic about half way through.

I will be on the lookout for more from Mr. TenNapel though. I highly recommend his Bad Island.

Emily Mills says

Doug always has great characters, interesting and deep themes to discover, complex problems to solve, and evil to be defeated and redeemed... All with incredible artwork. Another great graphic novel!

Ashley D-- says

It's hard to review this book. The adventure part of the story was fine, and it was kind of interesting to read a comic with so many super-conservative messages in it. It was your typical set-up of a Really Good Guy just trying to Provide For His Family. The first thing you learn about the RGG is that he's too--I don't know--Republican or something to accept much-needed welfare to feed his son during the Hard Times (mancession?). Of course, there's some Marilyn Manson-loving freak who, in a completely realistic reflection of teenage social dynamics, is bullying RGG's Totally Normal Son. This is because the freak's Overly Liberal Daddy doesn't take time to man-bond with his son and teach him traditional values--like, that only girls wear their hair long and such.

I think I was emitting a quiet, elongated moan of disdain during the entire story, even though it was on the surface a fun enough adventure story. There was just so much ick behind it all for me, personally, but it's cool to know that there's a comic for everyone! Now I know what to recommend to neocon parents who come to the library looking for ~~handouts~~ books for their ~~kids~~ sons.

In my own personal collection, this book would get 1 star, but I feel oddly compelled to give it 2 stars here just for being a well produced piece of conservative American culture in a genre that is--ah, let's be honest--a slightly different mix of conservative American culture most of the time anyway.

Recommended for parents who still feel angsty about the cancelation of Orson Scott Card's Superman, or who feel nostalgic about the last century's Archie comics. And, really, kids will read it and they'll like it well enough if they're not at the stage where they start thinking critically about white middle American culture.

Max says

I personally enjoyed the concept a lot in this book. It is a very good concept like how you can make things with cardboard that are alive. But the characters were awful. There was character development at all. Also it would take random skips in time. Then there was also the weakness for cardboard. Which is literally everywhere so it could have been a really quick ending but it was not.

I would not recommend it to an older audience. The reason it is so high in the star rating is because I really liked it when I read it. But now it seems quite cheesy. Maybe some people would like it but I would doubt it. It was a quick read but it was too quick of a read now that I look back at it.

Megan (ReadingRover) says

Imaginative idea about a widower and his son and how their lives are changed with magical cardboard that comes to life. The pages are filled with grief, moving on, action, adventure and bold colors. The story is unique and truly creative.

Wendy says

Another foray into the middle grades graphic novel genre for me! After a 4th grade student came in and said she loved this book (we had just put it on the shelves), I decided to make this the next graphic novel to read. After waiting a few weeks since a few kids had it on hold, I brought it home and read it quickly. I liked the beginning as Cam's father gives him a box for his birthday and they come to find out that it has magical powers. I could feel the relationship between them was one of love, but an uncertainty of how to talk and relate to each other. Where things broke down for me was about 1/2 way through when the neighborhood bad kid steals the cardboard maker and begins to create an army of creatures that eventually try to take over. The narrative started to fall apart a bit at this point. I did, however, appreciate the beautiful graphics on each and every page!

Jon M says

This book is about a carpenter and father, raising his young boy by himself, and struggling to provide for the both of them. He's looking for a birthday gift for his son and finds a man selling toys on the side of the road. He doesn't have much money, and buys a cardboard box, what the seller says is a great father-and-son project... but, there are two rules that come with buying this box. He has to give the scraps back and he can't ask for more.

So with the box, he and his son crafts a boxer, who the son names Bill. His son, Cam, is an imaginative boy who enjoys creating things. But then Bill comes to life, making their neighbor's rich and spoiled son, Marcus, jealous. Marcus steals some cardboard and creates some monsters who make more monsters and transform the house (and attempt to transform the earth) into a giant Cardboard world, conquering it and making it theirs.

The artwork and writing is both amazing. The characters are great and transform a lot over the course of the story. I found Cam relatable and the whole story amazing. This is definitely a book you should read.

Allie says

Perfect gift for my 11 year old son. He read it in a day! Then my 5 year old son wanted me to read it to him - and right after we finished it, he asked me to read it to him *again*.

This book addresses so many issues, and naturally. Nothing seemed pushed or hurried. A very fun read that manages to introduce some basic philosophical questions.

I took a gamble and bought this book online, solely based on its good reviews. I'm so glad I did! I'd highly recommend it. This could be the book that gets kids into reading.
