



## ALPHA...Directions

*Jens Harder, Stéphanie Lux (Translator)*

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Jens Harder takes the reader on an operatic journey from the beginning with the nano-seconds following the Big Bang through the next 14 billion years. We see our infant universe as it rapidly expands, formed by black holes belonging to another universe. He uses a cinematic style to show every step, with imagery taken from popular culture, archaeology, science, film, and art sources, and to take us through the formation of our solar system and the earth itself, charting the long course of biological evolution.

Alpha is the first in a trilogy covering the world and mankind's evolution. Alpha is the starting point of investigating the pre-history of Earth, from just a speck in the sky to the birth of life that we cherish so much today. It is the 'greatest story in the world'

## **ALPHA...Directions Details**

Date : Published 2009 by Actes Sud

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Author : Jens Harder , Stéphanie Lux (Translator)

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## From Reader Review ALPHA...Directions for online ebook

### Jan Philipzig says

"Sex and death, effective catalysts, enter onto the scene. The new sexual reproduction deprives organisms of eternal life, however it gives them greater autonomy... The genetic information is no longer simply duplicated, but combined and constantly improved. Possibilities multiply and the pressure to succeed increases drastically..."

Jens Harder's *ALPHA... Directions* is a primarily visual, meticulously and often spectacularly illustrated journey from the Big Bang all the way to the beginning of human civilization, covering 14 billion years between two covers. It's an ambitious work of sequential art... that happens to feature the mother of all explosions - what's not to like? A truly mind-boggling reading experience - highly recommended (though the English translation needs some editing)!

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### Simon Chadwick says

Alpha ...directions is a hugely important book, especially if you're someone who struggles with the concept of deep time or the practicalities of slow and gradual change in living organisms. The book covers 14 billions years, and tells the story of Earth and the creatures upon it from the prelude of the Big Bang to the modern day.

Although not wordless, the text is sparse, and instead the duotone pages carry us the through the various periods of time, introducing the pinnacles and disasters that shaped the world at that point and its effect on life. Along the way he also uses imagery from art and religion to highlight the proceedings, putting the particular piece into context as either an additional illustration in part of the ongoing story, or using a particular beat in a creation story to contrast our understanding now. Film and popular culture are also used this way, with Harder reproducing complex works of paeleoart in his style to drive the narrative forward.

It's an enormous book, 30mm thick, hardcover and deeper than an A4 sheet, so the scale of the work involved is fitting for the scale of the story it aims to tell. It's oddly captivating, easy to follow and utterly absorbing.

Whether you like popular science, life on Earth or are just curious about understanding the process of change over time, this immersive and intricate book will satisfy your curiosity with scope and wonder.

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### Peter Roberts says

Hugely satisfying, informative and incredibly illustrated. Buy it immediately

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### Berber says

Just a small side note: as a big fan of the art of Douglas Henderson I discovered a lot of his art in the book. But only one page is cited (p251). The others are p228, 294, 298 & 299. That's not very attentive.

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## EisNinE says

**Eisnein's No.31 Favorite Artist/Artbook\*. Check Out No.32 Right HERE. Go Back to No.1 HERE.**

### **ALPHA... Directions (Book I) and BETA... Civilizations: Volume 1 (Book II)**

*The complete wraparound cover art:*

*BETA... Civilizations; click on the picture to go visit that GR page:*

After 'Intelligent Sentient' got me thinking about other examples of artbooks with segments of sequential art DNA spliced into their makeup, like Al Columbia's 'Pim and Francie', Joe Sacco's 'The Great War', or Xavier Robel and Helge Reumann's 'Elvis Road', it eventually reminded me of a two-volume-and-counting project that I've revisited dozens of times: ALPHA... Directions and BETA... Civilizations: Volume 1, by German cartoonist Jens Harder. Even more ambitious than Jason Lutes' 'Berlin', Charles Burns' 'Black Hole', or its closest graphic novel equivalent, Bryan Talbot's 'Alice in Sunderland', Harder has worked tirelessly to shake the faith of devout librarians in the taxonomical omnipotence of the Dewey Decimal System... although I kind of doubt there's a librarian alive who wouldn't shrug and say 'close enough' instead of conscientiously sorting out the paradox. The 730-or-so beautifully composed pages present a clear-eyed but imaginative and symbol-rich history of *everything*; from the first quarks and electrons to the stellar nurseries, from the astronomical and geological melodrama of our solar system taking shape, to the alien elegance of the Cambrian and the first forays of life ashore; the tentative first steps and then the Great Dying of the Devonian, the ominous devastation that almost drove life back into the ocean... then there's the fun of the dinosaurs, tracing the Darwinian lines of descent and extinction until human civilization appears... on the final page of ALPHA... Directions (Are the initials of ALPHA... Directions and BETA... Civilizations -- A.D./B.C. -- a coincidence? Hmm. Yeah, probably).

*A series of lithographic editions by Harder from AD (Top), and original art pages from AD (Middle and Bottom):*

First of all, ALPHA... Directions and BETA... Civilizations are artbooks (they also have the interesting acronyms 'AD' and 'BC', so I'll use those instead); that's not all they are, but they are unquestionably glorious fucking artbooks. They share a deluxe over-sized hardcover format, lavishly produced by the excellent French publisher Actes Sud. Both are 8-inches wide and 12.5-inches tall, AD over 360-pages, BC over 370... with at least one more volume to come. The paper is a heavy, glossy, archival stock, and uses a picture-board cover without a dust-jacket. Each chapter is color-coded, using the same monochromatic tones for the artwork. Curiously, Harder shifted the colors for each edition, according to language. The English edition of ALPHA... Directions was finally released in October by Knockabout in the UK. Jens Harder is another artist right near the top of my list. Absolutely amazing work, related distantly to what I see in Frederick Peeters and Blutch, but with a colder, darker outlook showing itself at the edges.

AD and BC are also Comics. They indisputably use panels inside a grid, right? Very comicky shit. The reader's focus moves left-to-right, top to bottom, moving forward with the linear progression that mirrors our perception of time, as well as cause and effect -- all stuff Superman readers would approve of, assuming anyone is still reading Superman. He's too good at everything. Fuck that Gary Stu motherfucker. But before a group of manga fans can coordinate their nascent telepathic Akira powers well enough to make my head explode, I'll admit the story could have been orientated mirror-reverse and still be sequential art. AD/BC is closer to traditional sequential art than 'Intelligent Sentient', but the way Harder tells the story is just as unique... because the story is FUCKING HUGE. And while I'm still hanging on to the edge of this topic with white knuckles, FUCKING HUGE subject matter is also terra cognita for 'comic books'; just ask Galactus... on second thought, we should probably avoid getting the attention of a god-monster who eats planets. Just leave a message with the little silver bitch on the surf board, always following him around like a smitten schoolgirl. I think he's the big man's secretary or herald or some shit. That's a classic 'Alpha'-'Beta' relationship right there.

This particular BIG story, however, really sets AD and BC apart, being non-fiction and all. Artbook and Comicbook are both aspects of Jens Harder's masterpiece: a book of Natural History that is closely related to Ernst Haeckels 'Artforms in Nature', Audubon's 'Birds of America', and even Augustus Seba's 'Cabinet of Curiosities' – all provide rich source material for Harder to work from – but combined with Darwin's 'On the Origin of Species' and Hawking's 'A Brief History of Time'. The scope of this work would send many artists screaming into the night, but Harder deftly juggles the daunting array of academic disciplines: Theoretical Physics, Astro-Physics, Astronomy, Geology, Chemistry, Palaeontology, Biology, Archaeology, Anthropology, Botany, Ancient History, Art History, Literature, Cinema and Popular Culture. The story is 13.5 Billion years old. The story is about the stuff that happened after the birth of the universe, from the first inconceivably brief increments of Planck Time that set a crucial hierarchy in place: Gravity, Electromagnetism, the Weak Nuclear Force and the Strong Nuclear Force. The relationship between the Four is an exact and integral balance, a constant that cannot vary without making atomic structure impossible.

*More original art pages from AD/BC; the color-coded title-bars indicating period and epoch, are done by computer, but the art is still drawn the old-fashioned way:*

*From Jens Harder's breakthrough work, 'Leviathan':*

As AD/BC moves across billions of years to depict the birth of the Solar system and planet Earth, Harder settles in to the long march of Life, from single cell organism to the ubiquitous Trilobites and the other primitive ocean dwellers of the Pre-Cambrian and Cambrian. I love moss and mould and algae as much as the next guy, but Harder doesn't pander to the lowest common denominator with the protozoa moneyshots and glamorous fungae cheesecake photos. This isn't a text-book (or a slime-mould porno... sorry to disappoint). Every subject is seen from multiple perspectives; for example, illuminated manuscripts from the Middle Ages depicting the creation myth from the book of Genesis, juxtaposed against the billions-of-years-old collision that separated the flaming ball that would become our moon from the molten proto-planet that would become our Earth. Fundamentalist Christians are bothered by the hypothesis that the moon was once a part of the Earth, knocked loose in the chaotic demolition derby that characterized the infancy of our solar system. But if the Earth is male and the Moon is female, it's very much like the creation of man and woman in the Garden and Eden, when God borrows a spare-rib from Adam and uses it to create Eve.

Jens Harder's artistic style is magnificent, relying on his own creative powers to interpret disparate source material. This creates a feeling of cohesion that photographs could never replicate. His monochromatic compositions make every page a powerful work of art in its own right, but the work as a whole... pure fucking genius. There are moments that approximate stream of consciousness association used very cleverly and deliberately throughout, imagery from past, present and future. Oh, right. No, not 'future'. Forget I said anything about the future, because I'm too lazy to edit. Jim Woodring's 'Frank' might sit next to a portrait of Sigmund Freud, which might sit next to a 16th Century woodcut of an early anatomist dissecting a human brain; a realistic drawing of a long extinct ocean predator like Megalodon moves to a steel-engraved plate from Melville's 'Moby Dick', then a still frame from 'Jaws'... all of it perfectly, meticulously rendered in his unique style. Harder follows the vectors of both popular culture and human subconscious, and finds parallel trajectories, more often than not. This may be the most successful exploration of archetypal consciousness ever attempted, in the medium best suited for the task, and least often put to work... and that's just a part of it, a fragment of the whole.

If 'ALPHA... Directions' isn't for you, as always, fair enough. I'm sure some people are going to justify their lack of interest by dismissing it as a random assortment of images scribbled into a high school textbook, with no real story or purpose, meow meow meow meow (*See? It's so easy to be a sarcastic dick. I do it all the time, so I know. None of that was true, but we're inclined to believe the worst. It's far more difficult to step outside our narrow definitions of 'good' and 'bad' when faced with a work that can't be properly judged using standard criteria. For some, if it requires a bit of thought, fuck it, they're gone. If that sounds like you, get back to the spinner-rack, motherfucker. :-D I bet Spiderman's getting beat up by his own pajamas, or something equally invigorating. I'm just kidding, I love Spiderman. Alright, that's a lie, but I don't hate him... actually, that's a lie too. He's like Archie in a get-up that's way too boring and frustrating to draw, and my hatred for Archie is a pure and radiant thing*). It's a work of 19th Century Natural History, combined with a modern artbook; the Ernst Haeckel influence is melded with the structure of Sequential Art. What you end up with is far more than the sum of its parts. It's not an 'easy read', but I've come back to both volumes many-a-time, usually as art monographs. If you don't have the eyes to see this as the masterpiece it is, or you don't find this exploration of art and natural history and science and comics all that interesting -- fair enough... and I'm sorry. That's unfortunate. The windows of your soul have clearly been nailed shut and will soon be boarded over, to keep out junkies and squirrels.

**Eisnein's No.31 Favorite Artist/Artbook\*. Check Out No.32 Right [HERE](#). Go Back to No.1 [HERE](#).**

\*(view spoiler)

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**Jon Shanks says**

Reads very much like a school science textbook, albeit a beautifully rendered & illustrated one, charting life on earth from the big bang to the emergence of the homo sapien alongside reproductions of classic art & religious artefacts showing their interpretations of what was supposedly happening at roughly the same time. While quite stunning to look at, the narrative can be somewhat dry and it can be fairly obvious where the

author is trying to recreate someone else's art rather than his own (I recognised quite a few, including some from dinosaurs books I devoured during my own childhood [the appendix shows the author's own fascination from an early age]). The detail is impressively painstaking, but also means that we don't really get to the "action" of the palaeozoic era (the evolution of complex life forms) until more than halfway through the book, which is where it really picks up, but was a bit of a slog to get through. Overall, an impressive volume, but not sure if it's piqued my interest enough to progress to Beta.

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### **Pelks says**

This book is a STUNNER. It tells the story of the Earth from the Big Bang...in graphic novel form! It's only in German and French at the moment, but the illustrations are worth perusing in their own right.

My only critique of this otherwise stunning graphic novel is that Watson and Crick are pictured instead of Rosalind Franklin when DNA makes its appearance. However, given that these references are not explicitly named, it's not a big deal. It just leapt out at me when I saw that image because I think even in small cases like one panel of a 300+ page graphic novel, women still really, really need to be recognized for their contributions to the world.

.....2016 was a rough year, OK?

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### **Michelle says**

This is one of the coolest comics I've read in a long time.

Harder has attempted an incredibly feat: chronicle the first 13 billion years of the Earth is approx. 360 pages of comics. An ambitious endeavour, to say the least.

The production value alone of this book is amazing. It's gorgeous oversized hardback with thick, stock paper that really let's the art be its best self. And the art is amazing - I can't even begin to imagine the amount of research it took to accumulate the reference material necessary to produce this work. Harder draws everything from the Big Bang, to dinosaurs, to renderings of famous images/renderings of all of the above (and more).

The integration of images from other sources (ie. paintings, pop culture, ancient art) were well woven in too. It's visually interesting and adds a sort of.. texture to what you're looking at. Harder packs so much into a single page, making this a work worth revisiting.

My only criticism is that the translation work was... not good. Thankfully, the text takes a backseat for the art, but I often found myself rereading passages in an effort to decipher what Harder was trying to say. A bit of punctuation might have gone a long way in some places.

I hope BETA...Civilizations get translated into English (though I might try to get my hands on a copy of the

French edition if I can).

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### **Paul Bryant says**

What a headbanger, this is like one of those books that will make you smarter just if you have it in your house don't even have to read it but if you do it's a lot of very cool pix not too much writing from when the universe was just a little dot like a full stop like this full stop. until it's the big thing that you see up in the sky so this book goes all the way from the big bong to the evolution of the human beings from the dinosaurs and the microbes. The people that think that God did it will probably not like this book but I bet they will secretly think it's cool too. I see that if these pix are right from a long way off a microbe and a galaxy look quite the same, no coincidence, I think so, lol. I bet microbes are just little galaxies & if you can see inside there will be people in them too. Probably people writing reviews on a microbe goodreads. I wished I had got this book last year, I would have past my exams better and not have to resit. It is so big you could pound someone unconscious easily. So you could use it on any home intruder. This artist has put in a lot of pix that are from movies I know, obvs J Park but also Ice Age and Creature from the Black Lagoon and all those. This is when life has evolved not with the microbes, there are no movies about fighting microbes that I have heard of although if there is I will not be surprised. When they make a movie like Bikini Bloodbath Carwash you know they will make anything.

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### **Christel says**

So habe ich die Urgeschichte der Welt noch nicht gesehen. Wunderbar detailreich gezeichnet, unter Verwendung vieler historischer Illustrationen.  
Der zweite Band erscheint hoffentlich bald!

<http://www.goethe.de/kue/lit/prj/com/...>

Harder lässt auch bei Alpha ...directions einzig die Bilder sprechen, Wörter setzt er fast kaum ein, um die Geschichte vom Urknall bis zu den ersten Hominiden zu erzählen. Vierzehn Milliarden Jahre hat er auf epische 352 Seiten und auf 2000 Panels komprimiert. Er nimmt den Leser mit zur Herausbildung der Milchstraße und des Sonnensystems sowie zur Entstehung des ersten Lebens auf der Erde und schildert die Transformation der Einzeller, der Tiere und Pflanzen über die diversen Erdzeitalter bis hin zum Auftritt des ersten Menschen. Alpha ...directions ist ein epochales Werk, das in dieser Dimension und Detailfülle einzigartig in der Comicgeschichte ist.

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### **Joela says**

Heavier-going than I expected it to be.. condensing scientific theories spanning millions of years into a few hundred pages with illustrations.

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## **Fremen10 says**

Excellent ouvrage se situant entre la BD et l'ouvrage scientifique. Il ne s'agit pas ici d'un ouvrage de vulgarisation mais plutôt d'une œuvre tentant de sublimer l'histoire scientifique de l'évolution. Il existe quelques petites imperfections quant à la façon de présenter le mécanisme de l'évolution mais hormis cela on est proche du chef-d'œuvre.

4,5/5

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## **Freya says**

Review to come :)

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## **Penny says**

Was für ein herausragender Graphic Novel! Jens Harder erzählt die Geschichte der Erde vom Urknall bis zu den ersten Menschen. Dabei verknüpft er thematisch gekonnt die Big Bang Theorie+Evolutionstheorie mit Erklärungsversuchen aus den unterschiedlichsten Religionen und Kulturen. Dabei muss er sich weder für noch gegen den Kreationismus aussprechen. Er lässt vor allem die Bilder sprechen und fügt Text nur unterstützend ein. Dem Leser werden eine Vielzahl an äußerst detailgetreuen und authentischen Bildern geboten. Manchmal ist es fast zu viel für das Auge alles aufzunehmen...aber dann sollte man sich einfach die Zeit nehmen und auf der jeweiligen Seite ein paar Minuten verharren. Eine enorme zeichnerische Leistung!!! Band 2 (thematisch von den ersten Menschen bis heute) und 3 (ein Blick in die Zukunft) sicher ebenso lesenswert!

100%ige Leseempfehlung. Sehet selbst und staunet ;)

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## **Isaac Willard Chen says**

this is an incredible work of art, because it is halfway between a science textbook and a comic book. It tells the story of the universe from the big bang up until the time when humans began to evolve. It includes religious content as well as scientific, and also makes references to modern media. It is truly one of a kind.

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