



## **RASL, Vol. 1: The Drift**

*Jeff Smith*

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RASL -- a stark, sci-fi series about a dimension-jumping art thief -- a man unplugged from the world who races through space and time searching for his next big score -- trying to escape his past. In part one of three, Rasl faces an assassin's bullet and stumbles across a mystery that not only threatens to expose his own illicit activities, but could also uncover one of the world's most dangerous and sought after secrets. Collects RASL issues #1-3

## **RASL, Vol. 1: The Drift Details**

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Author : Jeff Smith

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Comics

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# From Reader Review RASL, Vol. 1: The Drift for online ebook

## Rick says

The long awaited new series by the creator of the popular all-ages *Bone* chronicles, the mature audiences science fiction tale *Rasl* centers around the eponymous dimension-hopping thief. Drawn in Smith's trademark clean, cartoony style, *Rasl Volume 1: The Drift* entertains and thrills while introducing a complex, interesting tale. Sadly, the volume is all too short, leaving the reader unsatisfied and yearning for more of what promises to be an excellent adventure tale.

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## Seth T. says

In the 1990s I stepped away from comics for a while. Not entirely, sure, but I did stem my weekly habit of visiting my local supplier every Wednesday to pick through the new releases. I got kind of burnt out on the whole scene during that era. To fill the narrative hole left by my newfound and half-hearted abstinence, I turned to film.

[Hey there.]

The '90s were when it became more common for films to appear on VHS mere months after cinematic release—and at a reasonable price too! Then came DVD and my fair-sized film collection grew obscene as I reveled in the joys of directors' cuts, feature-length commentary, and all the bells-and-whistles that studios used to entice collectors back then. (Note: the early days of DVD were fertile for film lovers for all the bonus features packed into discs.) I began to consider myself a true cineaste.

Of all the modes and genres, the kind of film I found myself returning to most frequently was film noir. It was something in the alchemy of sight and sound unique to noir that won me over—that striking admixture of the stark lights and darks, the snappy hard-boiled cryptolect, the femme fatale, the hard-bitten antihero, and the existential journey that governs the mode. I devoured every piece of noir cinema I could find: the real stuff in the range of 1941 through 1958, the proto-noir police procedurals, the neo-noir homages (e.g. *Chinatown* or *Phoenix*), and even the sci-fi noirs (e.g. *Bladerunner* and *Dark City*). I read books on the subject, both popular (like Eddie Muller's *Dark City*) and academic (such as the wonderful Alain-Silver-and-James-Ursini-edited series of essays, *Film Noir Reader*). All that is to say, I bear at least some small affection for noir, and when I returned to comics after my decade-long sabbatical I would have been pleased as a bourbon-spiked punch to encounter something in the mode in the comics medium.

[Not from you, apparently.]

Unfortunately, even in the world of black-and-white crime comics, the essence of noir seems incredibly difficult to achieve. There are certainly many good crime comics, but not a lot that even come near to successfully capturing the unique chemistry of noir. Perhaps the closest I've seen is *MISS: Better Living Through Crime*—which, while eschewing any number of the normative elements of the mode, still manages to exude the necessary vibe. Dave Lapham's *Murder Me Dead* (and to lesser degree *Stray Bullets*) also falls pretty safely under the noir label—it even has a so-very-noir title. Beyond that, really, I've only so much

encountered books that were influenced by noir rather than noir proper. And that's okay.

Jeff Smith's *RASL* is sometimes billed as sci-fi noir but is really only sci-fi that's influenced by noir. And that's okay. It's okay because, for the most part, the book is really good. And at the end of the day, even if the thing you want more than anything is *Billy Madison 2*, you're still gonna be pretty happy if you get *Last of the Mohicans* instead. Apple? Orange? Who cares so long as it's tasty and refreshing.

*[If rob had a gun here, one of these men would have bullets in them.]*

After Smith tidied up the *Bone* universe in 2004, he made a brief pit-stop over at DC Comics where he produced a short Captain Marvel story for the company. It was good and it was fine but what everyone wanted was more of Jeff Smith and what his own fertile imagination could concoct. Then Smith began producing *RASL* and everyone promptly forgot about him. At least so far as anything beyond *Bone* went. Or at least so far as I was aware. Granted, I'm only vaguely cognizant of anything going on in the comics world, but I do regularly read Greg Burgas over at Comics Should Be Good and occasionally read some of his cohorts at the same site. And I stopped visiting my local comics store a couple years before the first chapter was released. So who knows. Maybe *RASL* was all the rage and I just never heard about it.

At any rate, I was surprised to find out last November that the series had concluded and was collected in four handsome volumes. I immediately amended my Christmas list and sent *RASL* right to the top. I needed to see whether the lack of news was justified. After all, *Bone* turned Smith into one of my (and my wife's) favourite creators. It turned out that I needn't have worried and that even though *RASL* was merely influenced by noir and not the real deal, it was still pretty great.

*[You got your science in my fiction! You got your fiction in my science!  
Two great tastes that taste great together!]*

One of the most immediately discernible positives about Smith's book is the art. If you were a fan of *Bone*'s illustrations, you'll be right at home in *RASL*. My young daughter saw me reading the book, looked inside, and asked if it was a new volume of *Bone*. She's three-and-a-half and she could pick out Smith's style at a glance. He's built the book around the same strong use of positive and negative spaces, the same fine-lined figurework and exaggerated postures. And just like *Bone* was dominated by beautiful pages, so is *RASL*—even if the New Mexican desert isn't half so lush as Thorn's Valley.

Like his prior opus, this new work allows Smith to explore the divide between the visible and the spiritual, between the empiric and the elusive. The scientist-on-the-lam hero, Rob, is caught between mysteries his methodologies have a chance at explaining and the myths that roam his world unheeding the requirements of physics or the natural laws. He encounters the god he trusts, Nikola Tesla, through diaries, journals, and academic papers. He blunders into a god he'll never understand through simple acts of providence. Whether he encounters the divine or not is something that Rob is not equipped to discern. And in the end it doesn't really matter. After all, this is a thriller, dammit, and Rob's trajectory and the conventions of his narrative will not allow us to dwell overlong on philosophy or metaphysics.

We can't forget that Smith is modeling Rob's journey on the comfortable formulae so native to the noirish mode. Rob's a dirty angel, but he's our angel. He's morally tarnished (and was so even before he went off the grid to flee a government bent on information and revenge), stealing art and shacking up with a prostitute. He's a man of deep appetites and his use of Tesla-inspired world-skipping technologies only serves to

enlarge his antiheroism and needs.

*[Hither and come.]*

And as much as he's caught between science and spirit, Rob finds himself wedged between any number of other duets. Some abstract, others less so. Tormented by the ghost of a scientist and the ghost of a woman. Crushed between his rational mind and his hungering passions. Full-bodied romance and the stale whiskey of base desire. Selfishness and sacrifice. He's the hooker with a heart of gold, only he's selling his soul instead of his body. He could be a character out of Chandler if only he had a chance with the snappy patter. He's hard-boiled alright, but not much of a talker. He's closer to John McClane than he is to Philip Marlowe.

Still, thankfully, it isn't Smith's occasional nods to noir that won me over so soundly. It was Tesla. It didn't have to be him, exactly. It could have been Marconi or Edison or Lodge or Einstein or Feynman or Curie or anyone, really. But I love it when fictional stories (especially science fictional stories) take members of the historical record and insert them into the novel in a big way. It has to be believable, of course, but I find that when done well these inclusions add an automatic sense of reality to what might otherwise be a wholly fantastic story. And Smith does it well here.

*[My tenth grade self is thankful, as there was only so much Twain he could stand.]*

Nikola Tesla has, in the past few years, enjoyed a popular renaissance. He's become the scientific hero that primitive man a century ago was too short-sighted to see. For at least the last three-or-so years, content aggregators like Reddit have humped the leg of his ghost and legend so hard that his spirit's got to haunt with a limp now. And *RASL* comes, coincidentally, at the perfect time for all this adulation. Really, if sites like Reddit need to make a patron saint of a comic book, the book should be *RASL*, hands down. The man, while seventy-five years dead at the time of Rob's story, is the hero of the book while Rob skulks around as mere protagonist. We follow Rob but our eyes, like his, are always on Tesla. And that's a pretty mighty accomplishment on Smith's part.

The book, for all its wonders, is not without flaw. As he did with *Bone*, Smith seems to have an aversion to wrapping things up in a way that satisfies. *RASL* definitely leaves less to the hands of the authors of fan fiction, but there are a couple large questions that remain unanswered. I'm okay with living with the mystery, but at the same time I would have probably been more okay with the solution. But then, perhaps like Rob, I too have less patience for the invisible when there's so much concrete laid out before me.

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### Foot Notes

1) For a long while, video releases weren't intended to go straight to the consumer and were marketed to video rental houses. Purchasing a new cassette (for, say, that colossal bastion of taste and refinement, D.B. Sweeney's and Moira Kelley's rocket to A-list stardom, *The Cutting Edge*), would cost more than a brand-new game Xbox 360. It wasn't until the early '90s that it became common to see VHS movies released at price points near \$20. Which I know because when I wanted to buy *Last of the Mohicans*, it was like \$80 and so brought about my first act of piracy, renting the film and then duping it with a second VCR. Scandalous!

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*[Review courtesy of Good Ok Bad.]*

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## **Ren the Unclean says**

This book seems like it has a lot of potential, but gets off to a stumbling start. It is about a guy who has these jet engines that allow him to travel to different dimensions. This is, obviously, a cool premise, but Smith doesn't really do very interesting things with it (at least in this first volume).

Maybe it is just because this is sort of establishing what is going on with the story, but the story itself is somewhat disjointed. It is fairly action packed, as Rasl is jumping between at least two different universes, but it becomes too heavy too quickly for me to get invested in the characters/story. It would be more engrossing if Smith spent some time with throwaway adventures in the beginning in order to introduce the characters to the reader.

Smith's art style is very good and interesting, but it doesn't work as well here as it does in Bone. He doesn't draw humans as well as he draws more abstract things, and it really shows in this volume.

Overall, it is an interesting book and I will definitely give the second volume a chance, but I am not really sold on it yet.

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## **[Name Redacted] says**

Who is Jeff Smith? Why, he's the genre-defining/-revolutionizing artist and author behind the decade-long graphic novel magnum opus Bone -- a work that paid tribute to everyone from Carl Barks to J.R.R. Tolkien, from Bill Watterson to Robert E. Howard.

What is "RASL"? Well, it's a four-volume sci-fi noir graphic novel. It's Jeff Smith trying something completely different and challenging himself as an artist and a writer. It's a tribute to Nikolai Tesla, the Manhattan Project, conspiracy theories, hard-boiled detective films, and the many-worlds theory. It's gorgeous, cinematic, and not at all what I expected it to be.

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## **Carmen says**

Good story. Sci fi noir. I learned a lot about tesla and the multiple worlds theory from this one. I really loved the Bone series and delighted there in his art with the chaotic and anarchic energy of the Bone cousins and the peaceful, idyllic valley they stumble into. There the art had an epic storyline to unfold itself in, more like a fantasy series that extends over several trilogies. Here the story is more spare, and feels more like the graphic novel offspring of Raymond Chandler. In this work Jeff Smith explores adult themes and does so in a big way, wrapping a fascinating sci fi story around adultery, and personal and professional betrayal. His art here surprises because he is actually very good at capturing desire and longing in the black and white format. Not for the juvenile crowd (myself included) that loved Bone.

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## **Patrick says**

I'm kind of embarrassed that this book has come into my awareness, as I've been a big fan of Jeff Smith's work for years.

Most good books are difficult to pigeonhole into a tidy genre, but I might describe this one as a mystery-thriller with a bit of a sci-fi thread running through it.

If you're a fan of Bone (And I'm assuming you are) there's a few things to note here:

1. This comic follows Smith's style of not including any thought bubbles. (Like Bone) However, there is a fair amount of narration. (Which is rather different from Bone.)
2. This comic is less all-ages than Bone. This is something I might not have thought to mention before I had a kid. But my little boy \*loved\* Bone and read all of it at the age of 6. It was his first big solo reading project.

This book isn't quite as universal. There's sex and drinking and a lot of violence. Also, there's some science talk that younger folks would have some trouble with. Also, the story jumps around in time a lot, and I could see that confusing less experienced comic readers.

Worth your time? Yes.

Double points if you're interested in Tesla and you're a fan of Smith's style.

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## **Matt says**

Jeff Smith's Bone was simply amazing, and RASL is every bit as good. Smith does the same thing he did at the beginning of Bone and throws the reader in the deep end, allowing us to catch up with the story as events unfold, which is always a more rewarding experience than getting everything spoonfed to us, and also makes rereading the story a more desirable experience. Smith's cartoony style does seem at odds with the dark tone of RASL, though it begins to cohere better as the story moves along. Remarkably good stuff.

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## **Julie says**

Pretty slow moving (although there is a lot of "action" - shooting, death, time traveling through alternate world vortexes) for a first installment. I didn't get a good enough sense of the "rules" or understanding of the character to have any interest in reading the rest of the series. It's clear Smith is trying very hard to move beyond Bone, his previous juvenile comic series, but the "adult content" in RASL often feels forced. Shame.

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## **William Thomas says**

Re-title this book 'Quantum Pulp Fiction' or 'Harboiled Sliders' or... ahh, just leave it the way it is, Jeff Smith

knows what he's doing.

Rasl is a very serious departure from 'Bone'. It has mature content, is intended for mature audiences, all of the TVMA ratings would apply here except for gratuitous nudity. There's murder, theft, swearing, boozing, sex, and science-fiction. A damn good combination all around. The build-up is slow, but once it gets moving it won't stop. It becomes a perpetual motion machine powered by the sheer force of Smith's genius. The man has the perfect instinct when it comes to placement and composition within each panel and the arrangement of the panels on each page. His lines are near perfect and he's a master of the black and white medium, knowing exactly where to place shadow and where to leave off and let the positive spaces speak.

And it may not be the most original story, but not all of the world's greatest stories are the most original. Its solid and intriguing and makes all the right turns through the maze it sets up in front of you.

Grade: A

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### **Randy Lander says**

Jeff Smith returns to long-form comics after the success of Scholastic's Color Editions of Bone, with something quite different. It's a sci-fi noir tale, incorporating elements of Meso-American folklore, quantum physics and dimension travel and good old fashioned bad guys with guns. His protagonist is a hard-drinking art thief with a taste for the ladies, and the ability to travel dimensions to steal alternate world art.

With only three issues collected in this first collection, there's still a lot to be explored with RASL, and I suspect that we'll only know the true success/failure when we see the whole story completed. But Smith is clearly showing off his storytelling and art chops here, and if I were a betting man, I'd bet on this being another classic from one of the best cartoonists working in the medium.

The artwork is phenomenal. Smith's Bone was full of fantastic backdrops and characters, but RASL is set (more or less) in the real world, and a sleazy version of it, with back alleys, bars, etc. He's perfect at capturing this run-down world the hero has let himself fall into, and his character expressions and flawless action storytelling, displayed in Bone, are even more honed here.

The collection is oversized, which is great, because it really shows off the art. I continue to live in hope of a super-giant hardcover collection when it's all finished, at the enormous size that Smith printed his test run of the teaser comic in 2007, but if this is the best we get, it's still pretty good.

Fantastic stuff, and I'm completely enthralled and impressed so far.

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### **Erik Erickson says**

Having read Bone a few years ago (and it being as great as everyone said), and only knowing about his run on Shazam, I was surprised to see a new Jeff Smith graphic novel at my local comics shop the other day. I purchased it immediately, wondering how an adult "sci-fi/noir" would be from him.

I am intrigued by this story, particularly the Nikola Tesla bits (who I am fascinated with) and certainly



curious about the developments to come in the next volume (no idea how long this is supposed to run). I enjoy the sci-fi concept that the story revolves around but I didn't care much for some of Smith's obvious narration, presented via internal monologue. I would have much preferred he show us, instead of tell us, who Rasl is and what's going on. There is one flashback that reveals some of this, but a lot of it was provided through somewhat lame internal thoughts from the main/titular character. I get that this is part of the whole "noir" aspect of the story but I think it would have been much more interesting if it had been presented in a more subtle and decompressed fashion.

I will probably be picking up the next volume but I'm not completely sold on the whole thing just yet. Smith needs to use more subtlety to keep everything better shrouded in mystery and anticipation.

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### **Blake Adamson says**

This could undoubtedly be considered the polar opposite of Jeff Smith's classic Bone. Whereas Bone was a child-friendly Tolkien fantasy, RASL is an adult post-9/11 Science Fiction thriller that reads more like a Vertigo comic. The main character, a dimension hopping art thief named RASL, is on the run from some extremely dangerous people, for past actions that are revealed over the course of this and the next three volumes. Also intertwined in this tale are references to Nikola Tesla & Thomas Edison's War of the Currents, James Whale's Frankenstein film, the Philadelphia Experiment, & Native American mythology. Cerebral, introspective, and even haunting at times, RASL boasts utter originality and a respect for the references that it makes.

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### **Brent says**

Interesting set up; and the art looks great in a large B&W format on the page.

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### **Meepelous says**

A very nice balance to the Bone series, Jeff Smith can apparently bring a creative twist to anything. My only complaints are that it was far too short, and the art style was strangely similar to Paul Pope's though, which was kind of weird.

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### **Andy says**

Jeff Smith has given us just enough to whet our appetites in RASL. This oversized softcover volume contains the first 3 issues of his long-awaited second comic book series. (His first series, "Bone," was award-winning and best-selling.) RASL is the tale of a one-time scientist turned art thief, Robert. Using a machine he helped design he jumps dimensions to ply his trade. However, he's being hunted by a lizard-faced man who is connected with the mysterious organization, "The Compound."

These brief issues feature some of Smith's best illustrative work, and the pacing from page to page is unmatched. RASL is also labeled "sci-fi / noir" on the back cover and so may not be appreciated by every

fan of Bone. Also unlike Bone, RASL is also for mature readers. (Thumbs up to Smith for not being gratuitous within this rating! Sex scenes in comic books usually cheapen the art form. Way to *not* conform!)

Highly recommended.

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