



Me and the Devil Blues: The Unreal Life of Robert Johnson, Volume 1

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CROSS ROAD BLUES

Legend has it that if you take your guitar and stand at a crossroads at the witching hour, the devil will appear. He'll grab your instrument, play a song, and hand it back to you. You'll walk away an expert bluesman, but you'll have to pay the price: your immortal soul.

The year is 1929. Deep in the Mississippi Delta, a young man named R J dreams of becoming a bluesman. R J is a simple farmer who can barely play guitar, but when he takes a midnight stroll, his life is forever changed.

A phantasmagoric reimagining of the life of legendary blues great Robert Johnson, Me and the Devil Blues follows the journey of a man who really did sell his soul to the devil. Why not come along for the ride?

Me and the Devil Blues: The Unreal Life of Robert Johnson, Volume 1 Details

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Author : Akira Hiramoto

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From Reader Review **Me and the Devil Blues: The Unreal Life of Robert Johnson, Volume 1** for online ebook

Mizuki says

Me and the Devil Blues: The Unreal Life of Robert Johnson is a rare breed in the field of Japanese manga, featuring blues, the time of the Great Depression and a main character who is black man (in another word, African American. Just to be politically correct).

A main character from manga who isn't fair skinned or with blond hair!? How rare!

The manga is a mixture of fantasy and thriller, with a plot loosely based on the life and death of Robert Johnson, the legendary 'Grandfather of Rock n' Roll'.

Our main character (refereed to as 'RJ' by his peers) leads us through a long, dramatic and gloomy journey filled with music, crime, violence, pain, wonder, danger and death. It is a journey across a Land of Darkness (namely America) in the time of the Great Depression. It is also a journey in which the demons and wonders in RJ's songs come into life, with the Devil and Hell Hounds following the penniless-farmer-turned-blues-guitarist's every step of the way.

Some readers might find it difficult to understand what's going on with the story---after all metaphors show up often in *Me and the Devils*, and volume one actually opens with black skinned, chained Adam and Eve being exiled from the Paradise! But *Me and the Devil Blues* can always steal your heart...and soul away with its breathtaking story-telling, its daring plot twists and its gloomy, realistic but disturbingly attractive artwork.

Evan says

this book was amazing i could barely put it down. i read the whole book in one day. the book really shows that you will do anything to accomplish thier dreams. even if it means selling thier soul to the devil. this book is about a man named R.J who wants to be the best blues player in the world. but he cannot play the guitar to save his life. he hears rumours about going to the crossroads and playing his guitar and the devil will come and play a song and you will be amazing at guitar. but in return you owe him your soul. this book in a way is inspiring because this man stops at nothing to become a great blues musician. in the time he was alive the world was racist and it was hard to make a living then also alot of white men wanted him dead so it was hard for him. but he over came alot of it. for a comic it was a very good book.

Elizabeth says

Great art, great subject matter. But the plot wasn't very coherent or captivating. There were moments where I had to do a double take because I did not fully understand what was going on, and most of the focus is on strange interludes with Clyde (of Bonnie and Clyde) or on unusual mutations to Robert Johnson's right hand. Very little of the content is focused on music or the emotional consequences of selling one's soul to the devil. I would have been pretty upset if I'd bought this book instead of checking it out from the library.

Concertina says

Como que no.

Michael says

Hiramoto mixes the life of blues legend Robert Johnson with a healthy dolop of fiction and horror to create a fairly interesting, but maybe too-slow-unfolding drama. Young RJ wants to play guitar, but he's not very good - until one midnight, he finds himself at the crossroads and, per the local legend, plays a song for the devil, so that the devil will give him talent at the cost of his soul. RJ finds that six months have passed, and he's suddenly the most gifted guitar player anyone's heard. But his wife dies in childbirth. Then Clyde Barrow picks him up and uses him as an accessory to a robbery, and then RJ is captured by white hicks and Barrow - needing him for another gig and perhaps just slightly guilty that he got RJ into this predicament - tries to find a way to rescue him. To be continued in v. 2...

Some gruesome horror imagery - RJ sprouts ten fingers on his right hand, thus explaining his amazing talent, yet the fingers are sometimes visible, sometimes not (to him and to others), and some nice sequences here - but the three sentences above sum up over 500 pages of storytelling. It lingers on points longer than it should. The town where RJ is captured is clearly nutso, but we're given extended looks at their intolerance toward alcohol consumption and their racism as well. A black musician in the South is compelling, potentially tragic stuff, but this one could be stronger.

Michelle says

engrossing book about making a pact with an unseen demon so lost you don't even know where you are having illusions not sure if you are coming or going ...making that deal was probably not the best thing he could have done but it is done and get to go on the journey with Robert meet up with other people from the south who spoke the language that is hate we meet a decent thief and a crazed landowner. A really good read i enjoied it.

Matti Karjalainen says

Akira Hiramoton "Me and the Devil Blues: The Unreal Life of Robert Johnson, Volume 1" (Ballantine, 2008) on 1930-luvulle sijoittuva sarjakuvaromaani, jonka innoittajana on toiminut delta bluesin kenties legendaarisimman hahmon Robert Johnsonin (1911-1938) elämäntarinaa värittävä legenda sielun myymisestä paholaiselle. Son Housen levittämä kertomus soittotaidon hankkimisesta saatanallisin keinoin on jäänyt elämään, vaikka itse asiassa tämänkaltaista tarinaa itsestään kertoi sukunimikaima ja kollega Tommy (1896-1956).

Sarjakuva kertoo bluesin syvintä olemusta etsivästä muusikosta RJ:sta, joka kauppaa sielunsa, oppii soittamaan kuin paholainen ja päättyy kiertämään pitkin syvää etelää. Hiramoto ottaa aineksia myös muualta

populaarikulttuurista, ja vastaan reissulla tulee muun muassa Clyde Barrow (tiedättehän, se Bonnie ja Clyden miehisempi osapuoli).

Lopputuloksena on kuvituksellisesti mukiinmenevää sarjakuvaa, mutta sinänsä ihan lupaavasti alkanut juoni muuttuu puolivälin paikkeilla melko älyttömäksi. Lisäksi sarjakuva tuntuisi kaipaavan enemmän RJ:ta ja vähemmän Clyde-pankkirosvoa, joka paikoitellen tuntuu nousevan tarinan päähenkilöksi.

Ensimmäisen osansa perusteella "Me and the Devil Blues" on ihan luettava sarjakuva, mutta kun odotukset olivat niin paljon korkeammalla ja aineksia olisi ollut paljon parempaanakin, annetaan vain kaksi tähteä.

Elizabeth says

This was a disappointment. I'd been planning to read it for several years now. I love the blues, I love the recordings Robert Johnson made before he died, and I think the cover is gorgeous. I guess I was expecting something a bit more biographical. Hiramoto made up a lot of the story in the book, and I didn't like that. Not a lot is known about Robert Johnson, so if you want to write a full length book, I guess making up a lot of the details would be a reasonable approach...

There is a magical realism quality to the story, and magical realism has always left me kind of cold. Also Manga isn't really my thing. It might be a great choice for a different reader. If you like manga, are prepared for something that is part fiction and part biography, and enjoy spooky impossible happenings, go for it.

Matt says

A pretty amazing, and weird recreation of the life of Robert Johnson. I've got no love of the blues, really, but this is more an imagination rather than a biography, and it's easy to find more general artistic parallels, whether you play the blues or draw manga or write stories.

And that's not even the half of it-- for the second half of this volume, Johnson is on the road with Clyde Barrow, for christ's sake, in a town where they try to trick people into drinking alcohol so they can kill them for violating prohibition! This isn't just a hauntingly strange story (the circumstances surrounding RJ's learning to play are very sad and uncanny, and he's got ten fingers on one hand for playing the blues) but it's also incredibly pulpy and bizarre....

My only complaint, and it's minor, is that I wanted the storyline left hanging at the end of this volume to be resolved, so they could move onto other stuff. I worry it's starting to drag a little, but we'll see what develops in volume two.

Courtney says

It's a bit strange to see an American music icon rendered in manga format, but Robert Johnson is a unique case. You see, it's been said, over and over, that his talents were not God-given. In fact, quite the opposite. As legend has it, Johnson went down to the cross-roads and made a deal with the devil. It's said that he gave

up his soul in order to become the best bluesman in the world. Great story, right? After all, there are few bluesmen out there that don't credit Johnson as a major influence. And the mystery surrounding his genius...well, that makes for great storytelling. Which is exactly what Hiramoto did with "Me and the Devil Blues". He takes the well-known legend and breathes life into it. He populates the RJ's world with other characters of note from the era, Son House, Willie Brown, Clyde Barrow and integrates them into the landscape of the American South. Naturally, there are some liberties taken with the historical aspects of Johnson's life, but considering how little about him is actually known, it's easy to overlook any inaccuracies. It may not have happened like this, but it could have. And that's what makes it so interesting.

Lashawn says

Interesting supernatural reimagining on the life of bluesman Robert Johnson. Seeing that most of his life is undocumented, Hiramoto has taken the legend of Johnson meeting up with the devil and running with it. He also brings in Clyde of Bonnie and Clyde fame, and pairs him with Johnson in a strange, mad partnership that has them caterwauling across the south.

The manga gets nice and spooky during the supernatural bits, but even if you take out the supernatural, there are times when it's freaky, such as when Johnson gets captured by a bunch of men who's looking to do a lynching. Among them is a young white boy, who casually says the n-word and treats the upcoming lynching like a day at the circus. And the knowledge that people truly did make festivals out of lynchings truly is chilling.

I would say though that Clyde's appearance slowly takes over Johnson's storyline, which is why I liked the second volume less. But as a supernatural imagining, this was pretty good.

M R says

What an interesting reimagining of this man's life. I picked this graphic novel up on a lark while in the library and didn't realize it was actually a multi-volume book, but I look forward to reading more and seeing what happens with RJ with the clock ticking down to his lynching.

Kerry says

I like the surreal quality of the story and the artwork is great. Not a title for everyone, but I would still recommend it to anyone willing to try something new. One thing I did find kind of interesting was that even though it is an American story it was written for a Japanese audience and every now and again a Japanese hand movement will appear.

Zeo says

Low 3? I'm enjoying it, but the writing is iffy, the art style is inconsistent for no apparent reason other than hey, how about some of *this*? and the transitions left me more often than not wondering if I'd missed

something major in the last few pages. Two or three times I found myself trying to figure out if someone had gotten shot, or if everything had just jumped to another time or place or both, or if there was some other reason for Large-Mouthed Shock. (Once it actually was that someone had been shot.) Hiramoto's artistic strength is in his faces, so he leans heavily on that, which is unfortunate; his art is really solid, whichever style he works with, so when he tries filling in the world around these faces it looks fantastic. Then he seems to lose interest and either simplify the background, inexplicably change it (such as a big trunky tree suddenly getting swapped with an elegant bottle tree without the angle of the scene changing), or just ZOOM IN ON THE FACES ONLY THE FACES INTENSSSSSSSSITY. Which works fine if you're not still zoomed on the faces whenever there's any action, and also works fine if you're good with subtlety in faces, which is not as much a strength here (the story generally would do well with some subtlety, actually). The writing was...well, it tried. I was delighted to see how he drew RJ's splitting hand, as it was something I'd attempted to draw before for a story and not done particularly well at developing.

It's hard to figure out where the story arc is from this book - as mentioned, the transitions are awful, and as other reviewers have mentioned the story beyond the beginning seems tacked on. I'm interested enough to give the second volume a shot.

sweet pea says

the idea of a japanese manga about an american blues legend just sounds wrong. but, mostly, it is effectively pulled off. the first half is a retelling of RJ's (Robert Johnson) origins and his deal with the devil. the second half gets a little crazy with RJ unwittingly pairing up with another american legend. the last third of the book, bizarrely, barely has RJ at all.

despite the surreal plot twists, the atmosphere evokes the south. the illustrations are often beautiful and the frames are continually arrayed interestingly. if you're looking to gain an understanding of Robert Johnson's life, you'll be sorely disappointed. if you're looking for a bizarre spin on a blues legend, this is your jam. it actually makes me long for graphic features on other blues ciphers, like geeshie wiley, charley patton, and roosevelt graves. although, there's a very good chance i would hate them. this one, however, holds my interest and i will await the second volume.
