



## The Best American Comics 2015

*Jonathan Lethem (Editor), Bill Kartalopoulos (Editor)*

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**“As I know well from my own field, true *vitality* consists of stuff that’s further off the radar of general acclaim. The influx of raw arrivals. The deep cuts.” —Jonathan Lethem, from the Introduction**

*Featuring* Gabrielle Bell, Mat Brinkman, Roz Chast, Anya Davidson, Eleanor Davis, Jules Feiffer, Blaise Larmee, Raymond Pettibon, Ed Piskor, Joe Sacco, Esther Pearl Watson, and others.

JONATHAN LETHEM is the author of nine novels, including *Motherless Brooklyn*, *The Fortress of Solitude*, *Gun, with Occasional Music*, and most recently *Dissident Gardens*.

BILL KARTALOPOULOS is a Brooklyn-based comics critic, educator, curator, and editor. He teaches comics history at the School of Visual Arts. More information may be found at [on-panel.com](http://on-panel.com).

## The Best American Comics 2015 Details

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## **From Reader Review The Best American Comics 2015 for online ebook**

### **Stewart Tame says**

I mildly object to the use of the term, "Best." Among other reasons, if you asked ten random people what they thought the ten best comics of all time were, you'd probably get at least eleven different lists. We're not dealing with quantifiable things here. Do we measure the worth of a comic in terms of milliKirbys or something? I always mentally translate the title as, "The Most Interesting American Comics 2015," or something like that. I was surprised by the absence of some of the usual suspects this time around. No Chris Ware. None of the Hernandez brothers. No Ben Katchor. No Crumb ... As with any anthology, this is something of a mixed bag. Johnathan Lethem does a fine job as guest editor, and, for someone known primarily as a novelist, he's not a bad cartoonist. His comments setting up each section of the book were greatly appreciated. Some of the excerpts from longer works were interesting enough to make me want to track them down. And Lethem's comment about Steve Ditko refusing permission to reprint his story intrigues me. I mean, it's characteristic Ditko, but I really like his work. Might have to hunt that one down. Some random comments: Love R. Sikoryak's work, as always. His "Sadistic Comics" imagines de Sade's Justine as drawn in the style of the 40's Wonder Woman comics. Intrigued by Diane Obomsawin's excerpt from On Loving Women. That's a book I think I want to track down. Julia Gfrorer's "Palm Ash" was fascinating, very nicely done. Anders Nilsen's "Prometheus" is done all in silhouette, very different from what else I've seen of his work. Andy Burkholder's "Pretty Smart" was fascinating, very creative use of language. It reminded me in some ways of bits of Philip Glass' and Robert Wilson's opera, Einstein On the Beach. Liked Henriette Valium's, "Lacher de Chiens." Her drawing style is completely insane, but it worked well for this story. Gina Wynbrandt's "Someone Please Have Sex With Me" made me laugh out loud. And I'll also be looking for Matthew Thurber's Infomaniacs and Anya Davidson's School Spirits as both were intriguing. As I said, not sure about the "Best" part, but this is all certainly excellent work by some top notch creators.

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### **Courtney says**

2.5

I felt like it was a little lopsided, many of the pieces had harsh and or surreal style, but not much beauty or loveliness.

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### **Jenna says**

Didn't find as many authors who caught my eye as I have in previous compilations, which is unfortunate.

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### **Hannah Garden says**

"There is so much great stuff in here, as usual," is basically the review for every edition of this terrific collection. I think Lethem is more into experimental/avant-garde stuff than I am so this is not my favorite volume--I like story comics, pretty much, especially true stories--but it is nevertheless as always a total 5-star

read.

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### **Cintia says**

Reading this compilation felt like entering a candy store and trying a sample of all the candies, it was exciting, fun, and in each comic I stopped myself to taste it and see how much I liked it. After trying all of these delicious comics, I ended up with a big list of authors and works that I need to check out. Truth is: I barely know a thing about comics. Before reading this I was conceited when people started a conversation about comics, now I know there's a lot to learn, a lot to read, and that what I read still fits into the commercial stuff. Now I'm hungry for more comics.

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### **Dov Zeller says**

Overall, I found Lethem to be somewhere between annoying and intolerable as an editor, and the work in here is hit or miss. But these anthologies are generally hit or miss. I met a few new artists whose work I can now explore, including Diane Obomsawin, Julia Gfrörer and Blaise Larmee (this is a cool site <http://blaiselarmee.com/>) so I don't regret getting it out of the library. The cover is unreasonably grotesque and far from inviting. And that's about all I have to say for now. Maybe I will write more before I send the book back to the library.

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### **Jane says**

Some decent comics and authors included in this edition. My big gripe is that Lethem is a horrible editor. The way he groups the works makes little sense and provides no discernible context. His intros are throwaways. He semi-apologizes for grouping the female artists together and in another section his intro is a quote from a Wikipedia entry. A disappointment.

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### **Jamil says**

I definitely dig the use of "taxonomic chapters" in this and last year's volumes.

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### **Matt Graupman says**

"Best Of" anthologies generally tend to be a pretty mixed bag simply because the concept is a very subjective one. Every year since its inception, however, I've eagerly anticipated the latest release of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's "The Best American Comics" series precisely because their choice of guest editor has led to some pretty solid subjective picks. Charles Burns, Chris Ware, Scott McCloud, etc. have good taste and that makes for interesting and enjoyable books.

This year, the series took a chance on its first predominantly non-comics guest editor, the novelist Jonathan

Lethem (I know Neil Gaiman is a novelist, too, but he has some sturdy comics roots). Bluntly, that choice was pretty disastrous. Lethem's taste regarding comics is not good. Without singling out any creators, I found large sections of this book to be unreadable; choppy, pretentious, and unfocused pieces were the norm. This is simply the worst entry in this normally reliable series.

#### FAVORITES:

"No Tears, No Sorrow" by Eleanor Davis - A beautifully sad story about a workshop designed to teach people to cry.

"Woman Rebel: The Margaret Sanger Story (Excerpt)" by Peter Bagge - The acerbic underground artist's take on the life of the founder of Planned Parenthood.

"Someone Please Have Sex With Me" by Gina Wynbrandt - A series of hilarious and embarrassing sexual misadventures, both real and imagined.

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### **Edwin Arnaudin says**

This year's collection was the first of the series in which I've skipped any selections – and it wasn't limited to just one or two oddballs. Impenetrable samples from Andy Burkholder (on a textual level), Raymond Pettibon (visual and textual) and Lâcher de Chiens (ditto) may be avoided while David Sandlin's and especially Rosier Appel's make little sense in their wordless forms and sections by Jim Woodring and Adam Buttrick were weird for the sake of being weird. I'd say "this is what happens when a non-illustrator is guest editor," but in 2010 Neil Gaiman had a much more accessible and enjoyable collection than Lethem. (Not having read it, I can't speak for Harvey Pekar's inaugural entry in 2006.)

On the plus side, I've added works by Diane Obomsawin, Anders Nilsen, Julia Gfrörer, Gabrielle Bell, Cole Closser, Jesse Jacobs and Anya Ulinich to my queue and will be on the lookout once comics by Ben Duncan and Gina Wynbrandt are available in print form, if not before.

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### **Brendan McAuliffe says**

This series has been going downhill. Now we're at the bottom of the hill.

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### **Ollie says**

The Best American Comics series are simply imperative reading. Comics (note the editors don't need to yank anyone's chain like they do in the mainstream and deter from the words "graphic novel") are undoubtedly a booming art form. More comics are being written, drawn and produced than ever, and lucky for us, Bill Kartalopoulos has the monumental task of finding the choice cuts in this neat and lovely hardcover book series. So the importance of a book like this cannot be understated.

The way it works is this, Kartalopoulos goes through the hundreds and hundreds of submissions (and one would guess, the releases that he catches on his radar) that were released from September 2013-August 2014 (yeah, it takes THAT long to put one of these together), and sends them to the guest editor (Jonathan Lethem) to pick out his favorites. Of course, it's impossible to highlight or even find ALL the comics released in one year, but goddamit, unless you know of a better way to do this, I think we should all send

praises to Kartalopoulos and his comically long name for doing all the heavy lifting for us.

Like they do every year, last year's edition is simply a top notch collection of works with a vast range of themes, art styles, and story telling. I mean, what else would you expect? A cool note also is that this collection has some comics that I was lucky enough to notice when they first came out. I'm talking about the excellent *The Great War* by Joe Sacco and *Safari Honeymoon* by Jesse Jacobs which I would recommend to anyone. Of course there are also the selections I that popped and will ensure a closer look like *Blane Throttle* by Ben Duncan and *Woman Rebel* by Peter Bagge. Then there are the selections that didn't really strike a chord like *Lacher de Chiens* and *Pretty Smart* (forgive me as I don't mention the authors).

The point is that, as usual, the *Best American Comics* does a fantastic job of creating a summary of what's out there. You'll love some and you'll hate some, but that's the point right there. A better collection you won't find anywhere.

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### **Glenn says**

Awful. I've read this series since its inception and this is the Worst of the series. I'm a fan of Lethem, but his taste in comics sucks, imo. Too many excerpts that are too short to make sense; then there are some that go on for 10+ pages for no apparent reason except to bore. Just an awful selection of terrible comics (with 2 or 3 exceptions).

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### **T.J. says**

Like most anthologies, this has some hits and some misses. But also plenty of new things!

I loved Anders Nilsen's stark retelling of Prometheus, Gabrielle Bell's "Colombian Diaries," Peter Bagge's biography of Margaret Sanger, and Julia Gfroner's tale of ancient Rome.

My absolute favorite were by three women who are both artists and storytellers: Diane Obomsawin, Anya Ulinich, and the shocking, hilarious, wild Gina Wynbrandt.

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### **Nick says**

#### ***2.6 Stars***

Jonathan Lethem, who I've never read, has weird taste in comics. I had to skim through a number of these selections, almost all of which were new and, initially, exciting to me. Out of the 37 comic selections in this volume, I liked 8, including one of the few I'd already read ("*Woman Rebel*" by Bagge). Lethem gets points for his obscure and eclectic choices, but I felt that some of this stuff was just too weird, drawn out, and/or lacking in impact. I've read some weird stuff that blew my mind, elsewhere. A few comics here were just plain annoying to read -- not disturbing -- annoying.

## The Ones I Liked

Julia Gfrorer -- 'Palm Ash'

- A brutal Roman tale set during the Diocletian persecutions. Comes from a mini-comic available on Etsy. The actual comic is 20 pages, this selection is 15 -- not sure why Lethem left out the last 5 pages, but maybe they were just contents/acknowledgements etc.

Eleanor Davis -- 'No Tears, No Sorrow'

- this reads like a self-help parody that is actually an inspirational self-help story. I imagine most of us need to cry more.

Ed Piskor -- Selections from 'Hip Hop Family Tree'

- I'd had this one on my to-read list for some time. It's odd and convoluted, but I'll probably go read the full volumes someday. One of Lethem's selections introduced me to Rammelzee, who I'd never heard of.

Joe Sacco -- 'The Great War' (Excerpt)

- Understated insanity of the great war. Soldiers, are depicted in a 'Where's Waldo' fashion, scattered around double-page spreads in an innocent style -- except this was World War I, and as you read and pay attention, you notice the barbed wire, exploding shells, body parts and innards of men, as they continue to march to their deaths at the behest of their commanders.

Anya Ulinich -- 'My Year of Unreasonable Grief (Part Four)' from *Lena Finkle's Magic Barrel*

- Touching and thought-provoking snippet on relationships, self-esteem, etc.

Gina Wynbrandt -- 'Someone Please Have Sex with Me'

- a funny, absurd, yet thoughtful look at a woman who can't get no satisfaction

Matthew Thurber -- 'Infomaniacs' (Excerpt)

- a strange and catchy story with shades of 'The Matrix', that may be poking fun at Silicon Valley Singularity enthusiasts and some things I don't understand

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