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Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid On Earth (Pantheon Graphic Novels)



Synopsis

This first book from Chicago author Chris Ware is a pleasantly-decorated view at a lonely and emotionally-impaired "everyman" (Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth), who is provided, at age 36, the opportunity to meet his father for the first time. An improvisatory romance which gingerly deports itself between 1890's Chicago and 1980's small town Michigan, the reader is helped along by thousands of colored illustrations and diagrams, which, when read rapidly in sequence, provide a convincing illusion of life and movement. The bulk of the work is supported by fold-out instructions, an index, paper cut-outs, and a brief apology, all of which concrete to form a rich portrait of a man stunted by a paralyzing fear of being disliked. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I've never done this before. Buy a book. Can't stand it. Return it a few days later. Buy it back a few hours later. Fall in love with it. Such is my journey with Chris Ware's graphic book, "Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth". Let me tell you first why I returned it, and what redeemed it. I came across this book after a brief EW mention of it, rating it very high. Intrigued, I purchased a copy, and attempted to delve into its layers. Instead of intrigue, I found frustration, mainly because I simply didn't know how to look at the book. I didn't know where my eyes were supposed to go, so many of the early pages were difficult to read. Plus, the characters constant and sudden lapses into their daydreams made for early confusion. So, I returned it, happy of my decision. And then, I attended a live version of "This American Life" that prominently featured the work of Ware. His artwork

captivated me, enough to rebuy the book and try again. What I found was an entralling, captivating tale, multi-layered, and worth all the work to learn the language of his drawings. It's the story of Jimmy Corrigan, an everyman without much of a life at all, who is contacted by his long lost father for a Thanksgiving reunion. Jimmy agrees to attend, which leads him on a retrospective journey of his life and his family. The story is both moving and rich, full of layers upon layers. Once you learn Ware's language, and what he tries to communicate, the story begins to shine like a lighthouse beacon through the pages. I was surprised to find myself crying at certain parts of the book; my brain was telling me this is simply a comic story, but my heart was breaking along with the characters. That alone is impressive. Ware's drawings are incredible.

When people see you reading Jimmy Corrigan, you will get quite the gamut of reactions. Some people snicker to themselves and mumble something about a long comic book and wonder where "Flash-man" is. Others will take an interest, read the first ten pages, and put it down in emotional and intellectual frustration. Then you have a few people who will widen their eyes and say solemnly "are you serious...?" This work realizes the dream of Scott McCloud's literary graphic novel in a way that has no precedent that I have found. It is both accessible and intellectual. It's the story of an emotionally destitute and pitiful character named Jimmy Corrigan (actually a couple of them, if you want to get technical) and his search for a meaningful relationship with his/thier father(s). To tell any more than that (even that is too much) will destroy the story for you. It's a story that unwinds over the course of its reading, yet is present from the very first page. Things to think about as you read: The lack of female faces actually shown in any given frame, the significance of misshapen and flawed objects, changes in text, the irony of the title, and the pervasive exploration of the father-son relationship as it stands in the late 20th-early 21st century. Notice, also, how these presentations could not have been made as effective in traditional all-text presentation. Even more interesting is the presentation of the character(s) of Jimmy Corrigan. In Scott McCloud's first book, he talks about the popularity of cartooning, and how we relate to cartoon characters because their features are so simple. To put it another way, the more details a character has, the less it is us and the more it is someone else.

If ever there was a title in the comics medium that could attract the attention of the literary world, "Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth" would be it. Indeed, this meticulously crafted tale of estranged fathers and sons spanning three generations has already won much acclaim from reviewers and readers alike who, until now, would typically have never even considered picking up

a work of graphic literature. Originally running in serial form in the Chicago's weekly publication New City, "Jimmy Corrigan" took Ware seven years to create, though just by reading it you would never be able to tell. The artwork maintains a consistency throughout that suggests a vigorous discipline on Ware's part to create a cohesive and uniform story. Although it's true that Ware started the work as a free-form narrative experiment-never fully aware of where the story was headed from one "episode" to the next-eventually, as the tale began to take shape, he was able to rein in all the loose themes and motifs and successfully weave them together into a unified whole. The story opens depicting the title character, Jimmy Corrigan, as a young child living with his mother and already showing signs of an unhealthily introverted personality. His father is noticeably absent from the picture. A one-night-stand his mother brings home becomes a pivotal figure in the development of Corrigan's inner psyche. Moving forward to the present, Corrigan-now a middle-aged man living out a miserable existence still indelibly attached to his mother-is abruptly contacted one day by a man claiming to be his long-lost father.

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