

Bluesman

Rob Vollmar

Pablo Callejo, Illustrator

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In 1920s Arkansas, two blues musicians run into trouble and tragedy in the graphic novel *Bluesman*.

Based on the real mechanics of being a blues musician in 1920s America, the book follows itinerant players as they travel from town to town, seeking juke joints in which to ply their trade and make enough money to survive a little longer. Thus Lem, a guitarist, and Ironwood, a piano player, arrive in Hope. After a thunderous local performance, they are offered the chance to record two songs on vinyl. But before that happens, they get involved with two local women, and when a white man appears on the scene, the situation becomes violent. Though he's innocent, Lem is forced to flee from vigilantes.

Because the book showcases quotes from academic articles about the life of blues musicians in the era it depicts, there's a sense that Lem and Ironwood's travails are, in many ways, representative of historical realities. Lem, Ironwood, and others are appealing and authentic, while the black and white, wood-cut art style is a perfect complement to the dark and dangerous story line.

Bluesman is a dramatic, exciting graphic novel, grounded in music history and the experiences of Black Americans.

PETER DABBENE (September / October 2022)

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