

★ **Monsters****Barry Windsor-Smith**

Fantagraphics Books (Apr 27, 2021)

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Consummate craftsman Barry Windsor-Smith presents an epic tale of love, horror, revenge, and redemption in his outstanding graphic novel *Monsters*.

The story revolves around the fate of Bobby Bailey, a young man marked by family tragedy who enlists in the United States Army in 1964. He becomes a guinea pig in a clandestine project dubbed “Prometheus” that continues Nazi genetic experiments, and he’s transformed into a massive, powerful, grotesque creature.

A recruiting officer who harbors less visible secret abilities of his own is plagued by guilt about delivering Bobby to Project Prometheus. Using flashbacks to jump across different time periods and settings, the book explores the intertwined paths of the recruiting officer and his family, Bobby and his own family, and an intelligence officer-turned-local deputy, all of whom play key roles in the final denouement. Each character’s story line is given the time, depth, and space to make them feel alive in every way.

The book’s pen and ink artwork is exquisite, from its delicate shading to the way word balloons lead the eye up, down, and all around the page, maintaining a mesmerizing flow from one panel to the next. Despite plenty of grand, dramatic tension, some of the book’s most memorable moments come via subtle expressions of family dynamics around a dinner table, through distinctive speech patterns, dialogue, and lettering. Also revealing and affecting are the handwritten letters of Bobby’s mother, which show the measure of her desperation about her husband’s change in personality after his duties during and after World War II.

Years in the making, *Monsters* is a graphic narrative masterpiece and a haunting examination of the lingering effects of evil.

PETER DABBENE (March / April 2021)

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