

Oceanverse: The Collected Edition

Mike Schwartz

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In many ways, *Oceanverse* is a harbinger of things to come for publishing in general, and for graphic novel publishing, in particular.

First, it's a self-published project, and a print collection of a webcomic. (A webcomic is any comic, strip, or original graphic novel first published online.)

Second, its printing costs were funded by a successful Kickstarter campaign. (Kickstarter is but the most popular of a spate of sites which put artists and audiences together in an effort to underwrite the creation and distribution of art and literature.)

When harnessed together with the trend towards increasingly affordable access to on demand printing, these new services are encouraging formerly underserved members from the creative and audience sectors to interact directly, allowing for the release of an unprecedented amount of richly drawn, highly personal work. And *Oceanverse* is a perfect representative of the kind of exciting, highly entertaining new comics coming out thanks to these new resources.

As its subtitle suggests, *Oceanverse: The Collected Edition* gathers the entire run of Mike Schwartz's webcomic into one volume. And if I had any complaint, it would be that there's not more of it. Not that this is a slim volume—quite the opposite, in fact. It's just that this book is so enjoyable that it leaves one wanting to learn more about this world and its denizens.

An artfully composed chimera, *Oceanverse* is a beast of disparate appendages and organs melded together to create a body of work that somehow remains wholly unique despite bearing a distinct sense of the familiar. It's little wonder, given that Schwartz uses the same tropes and effects that undergirded and empowered the American Golden Age of the adventure comic strip to supply the sturdy storytelling framework needed by his universe.

Oceanverse presents the late-life escapades of Clayton Hemmings, a "Gentleman Adventurer" of great repute, as he and the crew of the submarine Red Herring explore the subterranean realm Oceanverse. A world of water filled with marvels mechanical and natural, Oceanverse is a wonderland peopled by creatures and environments both diverse and engaging. All of it is richly realized in Schwartz' flowing, graceful line work and restrained shading, and each character is rendered as distinctly in utterance as they are in action.

Ultimately, *Oceanverse* is a book that will appeal to adventurous readers of all ages and genders, and a tale that's sturdy enough to be read and enjoyed multiple times.

BILL BAKER (October 30, 2012)

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