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Comics & Graphic Novels

The Hardy Boys, Undercover Brothers #1: The Ocean of Osyria
Scott Lobdell
Lea Hernandez, illustrator
Papercutz
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Anyone who grew up on the adventures of the Hardy Boys and their intrepid friends won't be surprised to find that the brothers have joined the burgeoning cast of characters living on in graphic novels. It's surprising, however, to see how much the storylines have been updated. The boys now operate within the framework of today's culture and technology, caught up in a plot that could be a news headline.

Chet Morton, a longtime friend of the Hardys, is checking on the progress of an online auction at the local cybercafé—in an homage to the old days, he's bidding on a collection of old comic books—when government men in black suits and sunglasses swoop down on him. Frank and Joe intervene, but the agents surround them and cart Chet off.

Why? Although the agents bar Frank and Joe from helping their friend, the Hardys hack into his online auction account at a "hackers' rave" and find that international terrorists have piggybacked onto Chet's account to host a shadow auction of a precious Middle Eastern artifact, the Ocean of Osyria. The only way to clear Chet's name is to recover the fabulous jewel. So, offering their services to the feds, the boys and their girl friends Callie and Iola head for the Middle East.

Despite its modern trappings (the boys have a PDA and bemoan the loss of their bikes and GPS technology), some things are still wholesomely old-fashioned. Frank and Joe are smart without being smart alecks, and despite their self-reliance, they wish for the help of their private detective father. Their relationships with Callie and Iola, who are decidedly modern and independent, are honest and respectful.

The writer and illustrator collaborate to bring this new series to life. Lobdell is known for his writing on Marvel's "Generation X" and "X-Men" series, and Hernandez is a Lulu Award-winning artist who has created many *manga* books as well as graphic novels and a comic

book series called “Rumble Girls.” Her bold drawings and rich colors mark this graphic novel, whose faces and features are far more *manga*-influenced and abstract than the Western-style comics from the Hardys’ original era. That may be off-putting for readers who envision their heroes with more precision. Yet the images are striking, particularly the masquerade costumes that the friends concoct to crash a party while searching for the jewel.

While it seems fairly easy for the Hardy Boys and their friends to resolve everything to everyone’s satisfaction, the continuity of the tale is not quite so satisfying for the reader who remembers that Chet was bidding on comics; in the end, he produces a different item as his hard-won auction prize. Still, the tale is engaging, and the globetrotting friends move easily from one exotic setting to another with satisfying action and adventure.

Marlene Satter