

The Stringbags

Garth Ennis

P. J. Holden, Illustrator

Dead Reckoning (May 20, 2020)

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The Stringbags is a rousing historical graphic novel focused on World War II Royal Navy underdogs.

During the war, Great Britain was desperate for any plane that could fight. The Fairey Swordfish biplane torpedo bomber, nicknamed “Stringbag,” was thus put into service, despite being considered obsolete. Stringbags seemed to be easy prey for more advanced German aircraft, but their relative lack of speed had the surprising effect of making them harder for enemy naval gunners to hit. Despite their antiquated appearance, the planes became critical to several successes during the war.

Here, a three-man crew—Archie, Ollie, and Pops—becomes the Stringbags’ story’s vehicle. A commanding officer first calls the men out for a mediocre performance, but in later missions, they are inspired and courageous.

The story is divided into sections based on three major actions in which the planes participated; Archie, Ollie, and Pops are involved in each. The action culminates in an attack on the German battleship *Bismarck* that evokes an emotional reaction on behalf of the trio and the war’s real-life combatants. While its story is sympathetic and exciting, the book also contains fascinating details related to military equipment, strategy, and tactics, and its sense of history is satisfying.

The art renders the uniforms, airplanes, and weaponry of the time with accuracy. Battle scenes are visceral and heart pounding, showing the horror and confusion of war. An afterword separates the book’s facts from its fictions, explaining the creative liberties that were taken with the story.

The Stringbags is a triumphant graphic novel about World War II heroism.

PETER DABBENE (May / June 2020)

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