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Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid On Earth (Pantheon Graphic Novels)



Synopsis

This first book from Chicago author Chris Ware is a pleasantly-decorated view at a lonely and emotionally-impaired "everyman" (Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth), who is provided, at age 36, the opportunity to meet his father for the first time. An improvisatory romance which gingerly deports itself between 1890's Chicago and 1980's small town Michigan, the reader is helped along by thousands of colored illustrations and diagrams, which, when read rapidly in sequence, provide a convincing illusion of life and movement. The bulk of the work is supported by fold-out instructions, an index, paper cut-outs, and a brief apology, all of which concrete to form a rich portrait of a man stunted by a paralyzing fear of being disliked. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ware's hero is a doughy, middle-aged loser who retreats into fantasies that he is "The Smartest Kid on Earth." The minimal plot involves Jimmy's tragicomic reunion with the father who abandoned him in childhood. In abruptly juxtaposed flashbacks, Ware depicts previous generations of Corrigan males, revealing how their similar histories of rejection and abandonment culminated in Jimmy's hapless state. What makes the slight story remarkable is Ware's command of the comics medium. His crisp, painstaking draftsmanship, which sets cartoonish figures in meticulously detailed architectural settings, is matched by his formal brilliance. Ware effectively uses tiny, repetitive panels to convey Jimmy's limited existence, then suddenly bursts a page open with expansive, breathtaking vistas. His complex, postmodern approach incorporates such antiquated influences as

Windsor McCay's pioneering Little Nemo strips and turn-of-the-century advertising, transforming them into something new, evocative, and affecting. His daunting skill transforms a simple tale into a pocket epic and makes Jimmy's melancholy story the stuff of cartoon tragedy. Gordon Flagg

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"This haunting and unshakable book will change the way you look at your world. Ware captures landscapes made to flatten emotion—a clinic shrouded in snow, a sterile apartment complex—and yet shows the reader the meaning and even beauty in every glimpse from a highway, every snippet of small talk. Time magazine "Jimmy Corrigan pushes the form of comics into unexpected formal and emotional territory. Chicago Tribune "Graphically inventive, wonderfully realized . . . [Jimmy Corrigan] is wonderfully illustrated in full color, and Ware's spare, iconic drawing style can render vivid architectural complexity or movingly capture the stark despondency of an unloved child. Publishers Weekly (starred review) "Ware's use of words is sparing, and at times maudlin. But the real joy is his art. It's stunning. In terms of attention to detail, graceful use of color, and overall design Ware has no peer. And while each panel is relentlessly polished—never an errant line or lazily rendered image—his drawings, somehow, remain delicate and achingly lyrical. Dave Eggers, The New York Times Book Review

From the Hardcover edition.

Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth is a book unlike any you have ever read, graphic or otherwise. Chris Ware weaves a narrative that requires a lot of dedication from the reader; you may find yourself flipping the book around all angles to follow the story, but believe me, the journey is worth it. When you begin to understand Jimmy Corrigan's unique literary language, the reward is great, and it becomes very difficult to not suggest the book to everybody you know. That being said, don't make the mistake of getting the paperback edition; hardcover is the way to go for this one. Half way through reading my paperback copy, it started falling apart. Just shell out a few extra bucks if you can-- it'll last longer. 'Jimmy Corrigan' features rich, vulnerable characters, a wonderful color palette, and an overbearing feeling of melancholy that I haven't experienced in almost any other form of storytelling, ever. Give this little gem a try, its about as good as it gets.

Chris Ware may not be for everybody because his writing is so bleak and full of despair, but this is a

great work in the graphic novel medium. Ware is a master of balancing panels ranging from tiny to full-page, balancing humor and pathos, and creating a deep atmosphere for the characters. The story shifts between two time periods, and also has brief glimpses into fantasies and intermediate periods in the characters' lives. Mainly it's about a middle aged man who has never known his father going to see him for the Thanksgiving weekend (about 2/3 of the book), and his grandfather's experience as a young boy living with his father during the 1893 Columbian World's Fair (the other 1/3). I'm not sure if the printing is selling is the same as the one I read from the library, but in the one I read, even the front and back covers and title pages had text and comics full of dark humor and self-deprecation. Reading the book can get a bit overwhelming, but every time I was getting confused or felt it was going too far, something stunning popped up to push me forward. I don't want to give too much away, but for anyone who is not prejudiced against graphic novels or character-driven books, this is a must-read.

If you're one of those readers--I know I definitely am-- that loves books that induce a mild state of dysthymic depression, this was made for you. A story told in grays and beiges and emotional stuntedness, Jimmy Corrigan is an outstanding document of modern mediocrity. A man receives a phone call from his father, an unknown, and goes to visit over the Thanksgiving holiday. "Oh," you're thinking, "that's not so bad, is it?" Wrong. Alternately you will want to laugh hysterically at how sad the two Corriganes are, or cry yourself into a state of catatonia at how laughably pathetic they are. Jimmy Corrigan is a masterpiece collage of awkward pain and hurt. Do not expect any shining, heart-warming moments like Craig Thompson's Blankets. This is a growing-up story of people who don't experience anything, whose emotions are so boring that they bore themselves. I loved the truthfulness and preciseness of the images. That said, it is dense and at times, impossible to read without becoming cross-eyed, as Chris Ware decided he wanted to put the panels together differently on every single page. It's not for everyone, but for some people, it's perfect.

Too hard to read

I first became aware of this book through a review in the October 17, 2005 issue of The New Yorker. The critic stated that this was "the first formal masterpiece of the medium." It was the first review of a comic that I had ever seen in that magazine. While I'd probably say the first formal masterpiece in comics is "Maus," Ware's book is on the shortlist of greatest comics ever written (along with "Watchmen" and Bendis' independent work). At times, "Jimmy Corrigan" is a visually difficult book to

follow. It is over 300 pages, and the story begins a little slowly. Corrigan is 36 years old, woefully alone and socially stunted. Ware tells the story of Jimmy's first meeting with his father (Ware drew a lot from his own life). He also tells the story of Jimmy's grandfather in a series of flashbacks that depicts 1890's Chicago with fascinating accuracy. I would recommend this only to a highly selective reader.

Jimmy Corrigan is a brilliant piece of work. I am not (and never have been) much of an active connoisseur of graphic novels. Only in rare instances have I ever purchased and fully enjoyed such an item. I received "Smartest Kid" as a gift from a friend of mine, which she described as 'a decadent film experience'. Indeed this book (which really could pass as a novel) is quite a decadent, nostalgic stroll on a downward spiral into a bottomless pit. The story takes place in Chicago, and Jimmy (our poor protagonist with no self confidence) is chucked into a situation where he is to 'reunite' with his estranged father. Jimmy daydreams, he has flashbacks, and is awkward in every possible situation... and we do too right along with him. Ware's unusual and somewhat confusing style of paneling lends itself to the current journey at hand, which makes for an intense and thought provoking read. This book is a real page turner. How will it end? WHEN will it end? Is there hope for Jimmy, or is he a lost soul? This is not recommended for the younger crowd. There's a small amount of profanity and sexual subject matter. Many of the situations cater toward the understanding of an adult, and there is definitely a lot to read. But all that said, this is an intelligent book with a lot to offer. It might make a good item to buy for father's day. As my dad told me when I got it for him, "thanks for a thoughtful and rewarding gift."

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