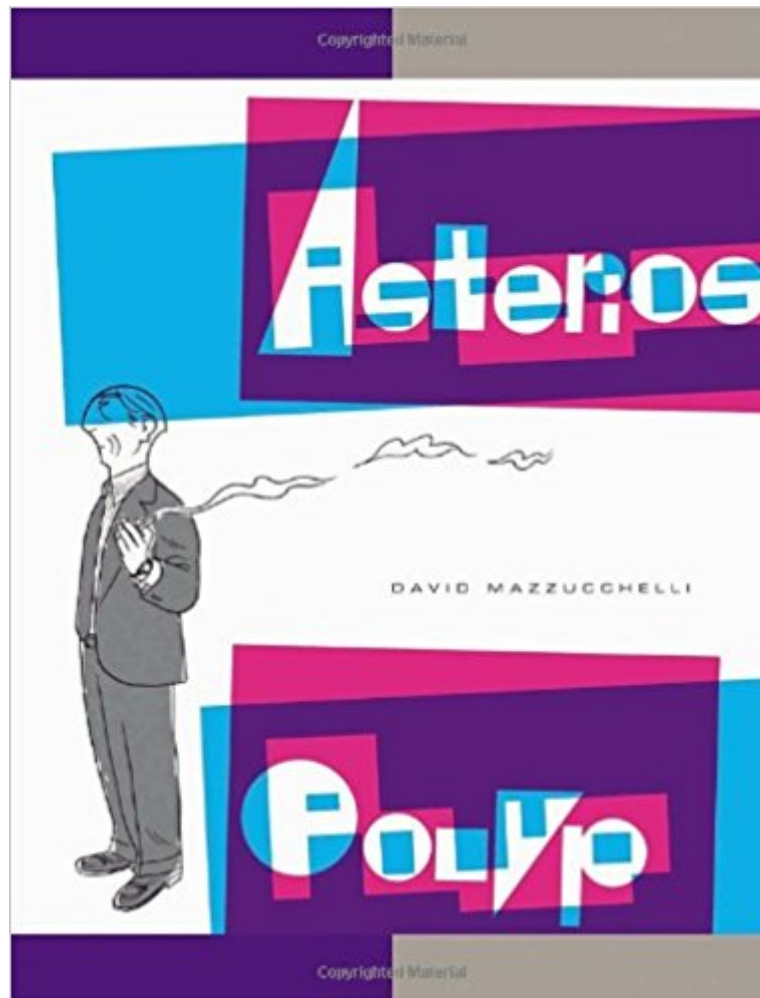




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Asterios Polyp (Pantheon Graphic Novels)



Synopsis

The triumphant return of one of comics' greatest talents, with an engrossing story of one man's search for love, meaning, sanity, and perfect architectural proportions. An epic story long awaited, and well worth the wait. Meet Asterios Polyp: middle-aged, meagerly successful architect and teacher, aesthete and womanizer, whose life is wholly upended when his New York City apartment goes up in flames. In a tenacious daze, he leaves the city and relocates to a small town in the American heartland. But what is this "escape" really about? As the story unfolds, moving between the present and the past, we begin to understand this confounding yet fascinating character, and how he's gotten to where he is. And isn't it. And we meet Hana: a sweet, smart, first-generation Japanese American artist with whom he had made a blissful life. But now she's gone. Did Asterios do something to drive her away? What has happened to her? Is she even alive? All the questions will be answered, eventually. In the meantime, we are enthralled by Mazzucchelli's extraordinarily imagined world of brilliantly conceived eccentrics, sharply observed social mores, and deftly depicted asides on everything from design theory to the nature of human perception. Asterios Polyp is David Mazzucchelli's masterpiece: a great American graphic novel.

Book Information

Series: Pantheon Graphic Novels

Hardcover: 344 pages

Publisher: Pantheon; First Edition edition (July 7, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0307377326

ISBN-13: 978-0307377326

Product Dimensions: 8 x 1.2 x 10.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 127 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #35,774 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #59 in Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Graphic Novels > Literary #3495 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Literary

Customer Reviews

Starred Review. For decades, Mazzucchelli has been a master without a masterpiece. Now he has one. His long-awaited graphic novel is a huge, knotty marvel, the comics equivalent of a Pynchon or Gaddis novel, and radically different from anything he's done before. Asterios Polyp, its arrogant,

prickly protagonist, is an award-winning architect who's never built an actual building, and a pedant in the midst of a spiritual crisis. After the structure of his own life falls apart, he runs away to try to rebuild it into something new. There are fascinating digressions on aesthetic philosophy, as well as some very broad satire, but the core of the book is Mazzucchelli's odyssey of style—every major character in the book is associated with a specific drawing style and visual motifs, and the design, color scheme and formal techniques of every page change to reinforce whatever's happening in the story. Although Mazzucchelli stacks the deck—few characters besides Polyp and his inamorata, the impossibly good-hearted sculptor Hana, are more than caricatures—the book's bravado and mastery make it riveting even when it's frustrating, and provide a powerful example of how comics use visual information to illustrate complex, interconnected topics. Easily one of the best books of 2009 already. (June) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

—“Mazzucchelli manages to combine breathless formal experimentation and read feeling into a story where every line, color choice, and panel arrangement builds toward a cohesive whole, lending an air of epic proportions to what would otherwise be a simple tale.”

—Library Journal—“This is an epic, emotionally rich, symbol-laden work that promises to redefine the graphic novel...David Mazzucchelli has made a beautiful, elaborate construction that coyly juggles style and content in a way few cartoonists are capable of.”

—Globe and Mail—“This brazenly original and complex work is easily one of the year's best novels, graphic or otherwise.”|Brilliant. Absolutely brilliant.

—San Jose Mercury News—“David Mazzucchelli's boldly ambitious, boundary-pushing graphic novel is remarkable for the way it synthesizes word and image to craft a new kind of storytelling, and for how it makes that synthesis seem so intuitive as to render it invisible.”|Asterios Polyp is a fast, fun read, but it's also a work that has been carefully wrought to take optimum advantage of comics' hybrid nature—it's a tale that could only be told on the knife-edge where text and art

come seamlessly together.

—NPR—“As ever, Mazzucchelli keeps both the visual and storytelling fireworks coming.”|This is a work that demands to be read, re-read, analyzed, and

discussed.

—Comics Bulletin—“Formally daring yet stylistically self-assured, Asterios Polyp is a bona fide masterpiece and the early frontrunner for best graphic novel of the year.”|It's the presentation—the use of narrative symbolism, color and visual metaphor—that truly sets the book apart. Much like he did with Year One

over 20 years ago, Mazzucchelli has once again raised the bar for his entire artform. *Chicago Sun Times* – “This is a comic for artists, and it plays with space and color in ways that maybe only artists will understand, but it is a story for everyone, and *Asterios Polyp* is easily among the best graphic novels ever made. Go read it, and read it twice. *Providence City Paper* – “Mazzucchelli experiments with numerous art styles and pushes the envelope with challenging digressions into philosophy, religion and mortality throughout *Polyp*’s tale. The engrossing effort culminates with a bombshell that will leave readers reeling. *Toronto Star* – “In *Asterios Polyp* -- the best of the summer’s new releases -- Mazzucchelli employs spotlights, coloring schemes, knitting, Aristophanes, an identical twin who died at birth and the wide array of secretions from a woman’s body to lead us into the self-centered world of the title character even as the center implodes. *Asterios Polyp* is a primer for both the fervent possibilities and the rich rewards of the graphic novel. *Portland Oregonian* – “Now, after a decade-and-a-half, he has re-re-emerged with *Asterios Polyp*, an epic, emotionally rich, symbol-laden work that promises to redefine the graphic novel. Published by Pantheon Books (home to master-class cartoonists such as Art Spiegelman, Chris Ware and Dan Clowes), *Asterios Polyp* is Mazzucchelli’s first graphic novel. It is also happens to be his masterpiece, the culmination of 25 years of promise. Mazzucchelli has made a beautiful, elaborate construction that coyly juggles style and content in a way few cartoonists are capable of. *Globe and Mail (Canada)* – “The beauty of *Asterios Polyp* is that its core tenet, the need to pay attention to life as it happens, is so well reflected in the book itself – in its lush paper tone and rough-hewn, elegant design – and in the way all the formal devices serve the story. As such, it rewards attention and even devotion. *Bookforum* – “The more you study *Polyp*, the more there is to discover. This is a book that stands with works by Updike, Roth, and other giants of American literature. It is undoubtedly one of the best novels of the year. *The Stranger* – “*Asterios Polyp* is a perfect marriage of words and pictures. Every drawing, color choice and panel layout is pregnant with meaning. *Columbus Dispatch* – “Mazzuchelli is using color to convey ideas in a way not attempted by most graphic novelists. The book is all about style, design and visual language, and Mazzuchelli is moving the discussion of all of these forward with *Asterios Polyp*. *Matt Price’s best graphic novels of 2009* – *Asterios Polyp* will cause comic-book buffs to swoon, sure, but the narrative – after a fire, an arrogant architect slowly begins to rebuild his own life – makes it much more than a pretty picture book. *Modern*

Tonic. What Mazzucchelli accomplishes, though, with remarkable clarity and a jazzy pop-culture eye, and which the written word has a tougher time with, is portraying silence, moments between something said and something to come -- even thought itself. That sticks; those last pages are as tender and heartbreaking a portrait of lost time as I can recall, and no less powerful for being nearly wordless.

Chicago Tribune: "Critics have decried the modern graphic novel's focus on form at the expense of content. With 'Asterios Polyp,' Mazzucchelli has put paid to that charge: It's funny, it's warm and it's beautiful. Go read it."

Newsday.com: "It contains a relatively simple story (and probably a deceptively simple one), but told in a dazzlingly stunning array of comic book techniques not possible in other mediums. Mazzucchelli is a genius of the form."

Forbidden Planet: "Each panel is a moment in the story that when connected to other panels becomes part of a scene or sequence that is rich in storytelling and fertile with ideas, inquiry, and themes."

ComicBookBin, A+ review: "Visually, Asterios Polyp is the lushest comic of the year--maybe of the last the 10 years, a decade not exactly thin on astounding cartooning. Mazzucchelli's work has all but abandoned the realistic musculature and architecture that made him stand out from his superhero peers. Asterios Polyp feels like three or four cartoonists working in concert, often on the same page, all of them firmly working on the 'stylized' end of comics' spectrum."

Baltimore City Paper: "This fan of the novel is an ever bigger fan of the magic that happens in comics, and only in comics, when text and art work together to create something wholly, wonderfully new. In books like Jimmy Corrigan -- and the just released ASTERIOS POLYP by David Mazzucchelli, it happens on every. Single. Page."

NPR.ORG: "This absorbing, idiosyncratic tale of love, ambition and opportunity marks the return of one of the modern masters of graphic storytelling."

Miami Herald: "You'll be in awe of how perfect it is and certainly envious of it if you are a writer. What a beautiful, staggeringly brilliant piece of literature."

Contra Costa Times: "The book is a satirical comedy of remarriage, a treatise on aesthetics and design and ontology, a late-life Kafkaesque novel, a Novel of Ideas with two capital letters, and just about the most schematic work of fiction this side of that other big book that constantly alludes to the Odyssey."

Asterios Polyp is a dazzling, expertly constructed entertainment, even as it's maddening and even suffocating at times. It demands that its audience wrestle with it, argue with it, reread and re-examine it. Isn't that the ultimate purpose of style?

Douglas Wolk, NYTB: "Heady with philosophical and

mythological references, Asterios Polyp vaults Mazzucchelli into the top rank of graphic artists.

It's a sweeping, provocative book that blends the richness of the traditional novel with the best modern art. Mazzucchelli's style - effortless and so versatile that you can't imagine Asterios in any other medium - is sweeping in every sense.

•Boston Globe
"It's a remarkable, bravura achievement - funny, harrowing and thought-provoking."

•San Francisco Chronicle
"A dazzling expertly constructed entertainment...that is a satirical comedy of remarriage, a treatise on aesthetics and design and ontology, late life in a postmodern, a Novel of Ideas with two capital letters..."

•The New York Times Book Review
"Asterios Polyp reads like an intricately designed and heartfelt work of metafiction, juggling design theory, philosophy and sly nods to other cartoonists to create a dryly funny masterpiece."

•Time Out New York
"It's as if John Updike had discovered a bag of art supplies and LSD. Elegant, deceptively simple line work and nearly subliminal color symbolism make everything go down like candy. The narrative comes back to earth for a profoundly satisfying climax, but you'll want to keep turning pages - all the way back to the beginning, for another read."

•Entertainment Weekly
"Haunting and beautiful."

•Los Angeles Times
"The simplicity of that facile summary, along with the deceptively cartoony drawing style Mazzucchelli has adopted for the work, makes it easy to miss its genuine accomplishment. The sparseness of his illustration gives necessary clarity to his complex storytelling, which employs intricate and imaginative panel arrangements and a constantly shifting chronology, meticulously constructed. It's a testimony to Mazzucchelli's skills that by the end of Polyp's odyssey, the arrogant academic has been rendered a tragic and sympathetic figure deserving of the tale's (possibly) happy ending."

•Gordon Flagg, Booklist
"I was completely blown away by Asterios Polyp, David Mazzucchelli's latest comic book, a pull-out-all-the-stops package that's funny, poignant and deep, with panels of thoughtfully shaded images that form a visual novel, a paper movie, and finally, an existential meditation on things that matter to us: religion, art, science, love and memory."

•Pop Culture Nerd
"Mazzucchelli's masterwork is by no means an easy read|but it is a transcendent one."

•Austin Chronicle
"The comics world is abuzz over Mazzucchelli's first solo book, Asterios Polyp. Rightly so: It's terrific."

•New York Magazine
"A sprawling work about the life and loves of a middle-aged, philandering architect who loses everything in a fire. The coming release has been compared to the idiosyncratic work of Thomas Pynchon."

•Wall Street Journal
"An absolutely incredible piece of visual

communication. [Portland Mercury](#) "Easily one of the best books of 2009 already." [Publishers Weekly](#) "A visual and even philosophical stunner." [Kirkus](#) "One of the greatest comics of all time." [Comic Book Resources](#) "We can all stop reading comics now, because David Mazzucchelli's crafted the ultimate comic book statement. Just take everything on your reading pile right now and chuck it out. Asterios Polyp is the new standard bearer. Mazzucchelli has somehow managed to jam just about everything great about comics into 340 pages of humanity, soul-searching, graphic design, philosophy and humor." [Newsarama](#) "Asterios Polyp is the work of a veteran artist firing on all cylinders, who, despite having worked his way through the sequential art ringer for a few decades now, has managed to craft something remarkably fresh." [Daily Cross Hatch](#) "One of the smartest and most rewarding graphic novels of the year to date." [Pop Matters](#) "Mazzucchelli manages to combine breathless formal experimentation and read feeling into a story where every line, color choice, and panel arrangement builds toward a cohesive whole, lending an air of epic proportions to what would otherwise be a simple tale." [Library Journal](#) "Mazzucchelli is a gifted artist/writer, and as a reader moves through the lush and varied pages of Asterios Polyp, stylistic surprises abound amid what feels like a master lesson in the form and function of design. He delivers a truly transformative tale of love and trust." [World Literature Today](#)

I greatly enjoyed this book. In fact I've reread it multiple times and get a new appreciation for some of the details each time. It's an enjoyable existential journey through the life of Asterios Polyp, a complex and very realistically rendered human character. He's not there to be the hero or villain, he is presented, quite realistically, as a typical human with foibles, faults, ego and jealousy. Asterios is revisiting the entirety of his life, art and love and how and why he has viewed things is reflected, quite brilliantly in Mazzucchelli's artistic approach. Asterios is an artist/architect that sees things in his personal life very much in the same way as his approach to his work; precisely, mathematically and rigidly. It's only when his carefully catalogued life is subject to an unexpected event that he's forced to start living outside the lines without the safety net of structure that he starts to reflect and evolve. Every time I reread the book I pick up on little details and gain a new appreciation of the subtleties of the story. While some of it is open to interpretation I think what could potentially be considered subjective was actually quite intentionally calculated....that or maybe I'm forcing connections where there aren't any. Regardless, it's a triumph and a wonderful use of the medium.

An outstanding effort from David Mazzuchelli, artist on such memorable works as Daredevil: Born Again, Batman: Year One, the graphic adaptation of Paul Auster's City of Glass, and his late, lamented series, Rubber Blanket. Telling the compelling and provocative story of architect turned vagabond Asterios Polyp, Mazzuchelli's graphic novel delights and disturbs, as readers are treated to vignettes from Polyp's life, from the death of his twin, to his time as a professor of architecture, to his failed marriage, to his days as an auto mechanic. Mazzuchelli's quirky art (Polyp, for instance, looks like a cross between the Dick Tracy villains The Mole and The Brow), innovative page layouts, and creative inking and coloring enhance the intriguing story he has to tell, a story about how one man ultimately reconciles himself to the life he's lived. It's probably too early in his career to label this his magnum opus, but it certainly provides a daunting standard for future works.

This work is a master stroke in fiction. This work is a master stroke in complex simplicity. This work is a master stroke in comics. Not since CATCHER IN THE RYE have I had such a moving experience in story telling. It's difficult for prose to make me...feel anything. That is better suited through the mediums of music and film. This work had done it. It helps you understand the different for the way men and women love, why we love those ways and that, if both sees give a little, True, mature, mental and emotional love can occur. Even if we mess up along the way. And this isn't a love story. Not to me, at least. This is a character piece. Think SEYMORE: AN INTRODUCTION. This is for all those people who still comic graphic fiction (comics) a children's medium. There is no why you have that same consideration after you close this book. None. Read it now so you change your life.

Everything about this graphic novel is fantastic. The use of color and line are both sparing and clever, and everything is drawn with great intention, echoing the fact that the two main characters are professors of architecture and sculpture. The story is told with a series of flashbacks, and even minor visual details come back and recur later. This book really does create a new genre of literature; although the story would make an acceptable (if not slightly boring) plain-text novel about the eccentric life of an academic/intellectual, casting it as a graphic novel elevates it to something much, much more. So many elements of the story are enhanced by the use of drawing... it's hard to describe exactly how it happens, but somehow the fusion of text and art ends up being greater than the sum of the parts. I love the fact that both of the main characters are university professors -- there are plenty of jabs at academia, and as college faculty member myself, I resonated with Asterios's

own (overly?) analytical experience with and approach to romance. Asterios's character flaws made me smile sometimes with shared humor, once or twice with schadenfreude, and a few times with grim recognition. Add to this layers of symbolism, double-meanings, karmic coincidences, and lovable side-characters, and overall this is a surprisingly brilliant book. Don't let the large (350) page count deter you -- with such sparse text, it goes very fast. Overall, this is the best "serious" (non-fantasy, non-scifi) fiction I have read in the past year, if not past 5 or 10 years. If you've never read a "serious" graphic novel before, definitely read this one as an example of the best of the genre. I originally read my local library's copy, but I bought myself one of my own just so I can return to it and reread it periodically in the future.

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