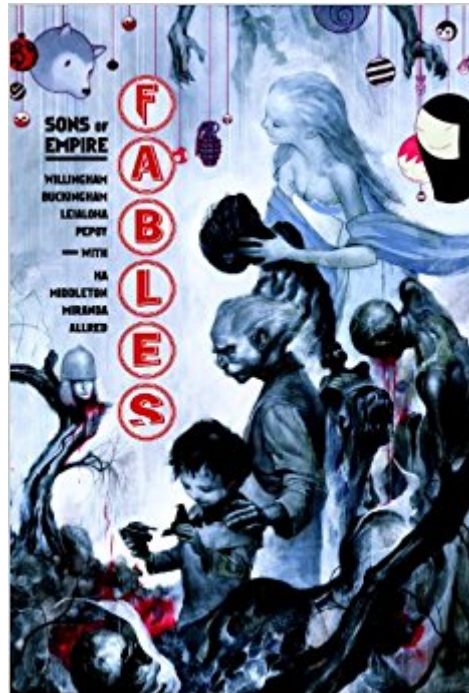




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Fables, Vol. 9: Sons Of Empire



Synopsis

Collecting FABLES #52-59! Pinocchio suffers seriously divided loyalties between his father, the evil Adversary, and his fellow Fable refugees in New York. Plus, Bigby Wolf reluctantly decides it's finally time to square accounts with his long-estranged father, the North Wind, and makes a journey with Snow White and their kids to find him.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Reeling from Bigby Wolf's destruction of his workshop and magic-tree lot (see *Wolves* 2006), the Adversary and the imperial forces of the Homelands plan a scorched-earth invasion of not just Fabletown but also the entire planet of the mundies (i.e., us normal humans). But Pinocchio, now back in the Homelands and reensconced with Gepetto (who, as everyone except ordinary Fables knows, is the Adversary), throws a bucket of cold reality on the scheme. This is all more entrancing than it may sound. Short-short stories featuring minor Fables and the still-flowering stylishness of Mark Buckingham's drawing enjoyably relieve the general somberness. Ray Olson

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"Probably the smartest mainstream comic going . . . a memorable, uncomfortably amusing treat."

Some SPOILERS for those who haven't yet read the prior FABLES trades. Bill Willingham keeps knocking this thing out of the park, as FABLES remains one of the enduring top notch comic books currently being written. Willingham took popular characters from various fairy tales, folklore,

mythology, and literature and plonked them all down in a Manhattan neighborhood secretly known as Fabletown. There, these immortals live in exile, having, many centuries ago, been driven out of their Homelands by the rapacious Adversary. In issue 50 (see *Fables Vol. 8: Wolves*), Bigby Wolf succeeded in his mission to strike back at the Adversary, who of course isn't tickled pink by this development. After the big 50th issue hullabaloo, Willingham slows the pace some. This more contemplative set of issues (#52-59) reprinted in *FABLES: Vol. 9: SONS OF EMPIRE* lends a sense that, in this particular stretch, Willingham is merely biding his time. In fact, what he's doing is setting the stage for some very huge explosions down the road. Things do happen in these issues, just not so much on a grand scale. The 4-part "Sons of Empire" kicks things off. This story arc differs from the norm in that it's narrated mostly from the perspective of the Adversary and his lieutenants. If you've read *Fables Vol. 6: Homelands*, then you already know that the mysterious Adversary turns out to be Gepetto, the humble old gent who carved Pinocchio. Not too many denizens of the Homelands are clued in that Gepetto is the real power behind the throne, the homie who runs the joint, and that the awesome Emperor is merely a figurehead and another of Gepetto's carved puppets. In "Sons of Empire," Gepetto and his inner circle meet to formulate a plan of action in the war against Fabletown which Gepetto means to initiate in three years' time. We also meet a grown-up Hansel (but no sign of Gretel), and he cuts a rather sinister figure. Today, he's known (and feared) in the Homelands as the Inquisitor General Hansel. He also becomes the Adversary's ambassador to Fabletown (but, of course, we know there's an insidious hidden agenda, right?). At the end of each of these issues are tacked on brief stories focusing on several of *FABLES'* ancillary characters. So, for instance, we find out how Rapunzel and her hair (which grows impossibly fast) cope in the mundy world. Issue #56 is the Christmas extravaganza and reveals, to no one's surprise, that Santa Claus is himself a fable. This also catches us up with the Wolf household, as Bigby, Snow, and their shapeshifting cubs celebrate their first Christmas. And something happens to Flycatcher, which sets up the upcoming 9-part story arc "The Good Prince" (*Fables Vol. 10: The Good Prince*). Then comes the two-part "Father and Son" story arc, in which Bigby and Snow take their children to visit their grandfather, the North Wind, for the first time in the Homelands. There, Bigby continues the cubs' training by instructing them to hunt for a kill in the woods. But what Bigby doesn't know is that ravening monsters roam the North Wind's backyard. It's always satisfying whenever the Wolf clan is featured, as I've grown very fond of Bigby, Snow and their rugrats. "Father and Son" also explores more of the uneasy relationship between Bigby and his father, and we also meet Bigby's no-good brothers (these guys really are poster boys for family dysfunction). If nothing else, this two-parter demonstrates that no one is still quite as big and bad and awesome as

Bigby Wolf. But where's Ghost, Bigby and Snow's seventh (and invisible) son?" "Burning Questions" is this trade's final issue, and in this one Willingham strives to respond to the readers' most often asked questions. So if you want to get the lowdown on things like the training methods for new recruits in the Mouse Police, or Prince Charming's first love, or who caught Snow's wedding bouquet, then this issue'll serve up some answers. Mark Buckingham and Steve Leialoha keep on churning out exemplary artwork. They handle pencils and inks for the 4-part "Sons of Empire" and "Jiminy Christmas," while Michael Allred is decent on the 2-part "Father and Son." Meanwhile, a host of artists take on the 16 really short stories included. Storywise, these issues are rich in content, even if nothing truly momentous happens (unless you count the Adversary declaring his intention to war with Fabletown and the good old U.S. of A. - but, c'mon, that was a given). As usual, Bill Willingham provides depth, humor and twists in his storytelling. Fifty issues plus, and the man refuses to slack off.

War is coming to Fabletown, and The empire's got victory all planned out! At first I thought this would all be filler but I was amazed to find a great level of detail in the way this future war was examined. The plan is simple, spread disease and let our allies kill as many as possible. But a victory seems unlikely when Pinocchio explains why wiping out the mundys won't be so easy. Even though these plans were mainly hypothetical, it really was exciting storytelling. A can't miss if you like good war stories.

Excellent contrasts in the family dynamics of the fable town and empire characters made for a terrific study - and sets up some interesting stories for the future. The variation in artists made this challenging to read though. - I liked the original series' artwork the most to date.

Both this volume and last volume have led to not much in the Fables world. Nothing comes to Fruition. Storylines are given a short stick or leave nothing behind but vague and obscure questions (flycatcher and Mr. North's backstory) all in all they have been disappointing in comparison to the earlier plotlines which were well thought out and intriguing.

At the heart of this collection: evil machinations, plans and schemes in the Adversary's Empire; a long-lasting conflict between a father and a son coming to a resolution of sorts. Add to this a very grim twist on the aftermath of the Hansel and Gretel story that makes Frau Totenkinder look almost benign; a hint that the humblest and maybe most tragic of all the residents of Fabletown may turn

out to be their savior; little snippets of background material and vignettes on Fables plus one potentially significant non-Fable. One of the things I like most about the characters is that even the most evil ones do have a story behind them, which reveals the choices and paths that made them become whom we meet here. And the good ones are never quite as clean as we might like to think of them either. Everything has more than one side and Fables makes a point of virtually never letting us forget that. As always, or maybe even more so, simply brilliant.

The first half of this collection contains some of the very best FABLES stories of all. As the Adversary and his minions meet to plot the demise of Fabletown (and Earth by association) we start getting clues about the future direction of the story. The art and drama of the Snow Queen's plan for invasion, and especially Pinocchio's predictions of our world's counter-invasion, make these segments some of my favorite of the series. Even Red Riding Hood's make-over and the ensuing trouble for Flycatcher make great reading. And getting to meet some new potentially-important characters like the Gnome King and Rapunzel make the first part of this volume stand out as being even better than usual. The second half of the story, however, takes a turn towards dullness. The story itself, describing Snow White and Bigby's first Christmas as a family, exploring the relationship between Rose Red and Boy Blue, and then the trip to the Homelands to visit Grandfather North, is satisfactory (but not great). The art however, takes a serious hit as new artists are given whole swaths of story to draw, with less-than-pleasing results. Particularly the Michael Allred (and wife) team's efforts were irritating to me. Sketchy and weirdly-detailed, these portions make the characters look goofy, ugly, or just too different to be comfortable for me. Maybe it's just a matter of personal opinion, but I found the artwork to seriously detract from my enjoyment of most of the last half of this volume. On the other hand, the end of this volume contains some gems, with the very short stories answering the questions or readers about miscellaneous happenings in Fabletown. Definitely a good addition to the story, as the series continues to rock, but I hope the second half doesn't indicate a trend with the art.

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