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Fables Vol. 6: Homelands



Synopsis

Collecting issues #34-41 of writer Bill Willingham's Eisner Award-winning creation, HOMELANDS follows Boy Blue on a mission of revenge as he uncovers the Adversary's true identity! Plus, the 2-part story of Jack's adventures in Hollywood and the one-shot story of Mowgli's return to Fabletown.

Book Information

Series: Fables (Book 6)

Paperback: 192 pages

Publisher: Vertigo (January 1, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1401205003

ISBN-13: 978-1401205003

Product Dimensions: 6.6 x 0.5 x 10.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 48 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #63,674 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #28 in Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Graphic Novels > Adaptations #202 in Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Publishers > DC #231 in Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Fantasy Graphic Novels

Customer Reviews

This clever, enjoyable series written by Willingham, has a rather ingenious premise: what if all the characters of fairy tales lived, loved, schemed, and fought in a modern-day city of their own? This installment contains two fun story arcs. One, a cute satire of contemporary Hollywood, stars Jack, of beanstalk fame, portrayed as a rather unsavory trickster. Making his way to Hollywood with a fistful of cash, he becomes a wildly successful producer of films based on his own mythological exploits. Eventually, though, his ruthless business practices and unsavory past catch up with him. In a longer story, Little Boy Blue goes on an epic quest to find and kill a shadowy tyrant [...] The more one reads of the series, the more the narrative strands bear thematic fruit. Willingham clearly has an immense amount of fun playing with these characters and their histories, and the art, mostly by Buckingham, is a perfect match: clear, fanciful and finely drawn. Fables is an excellent series in the tradition of Sandman, one that rewards careful attention and loyalty. (Jan.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

The last installment of Willingham and principal artist Mark Buckingham's saga of fairy-tale characters in exile, *The Mean Seasons* (2005), seemed to tread water after the cataclysm in *arch of the Wooden Soldiers* (2004) and before more hurly-burly. Home lands, while it reveals the long-sought identity of the Adversary, whose forces drove the exiles out and threaten them still, consists of cloak-and-dagger stuff, however, not warfare. Before the central action resumes, the rather too rudimentarily drawn (by David Hahn) "Jack Be Nimble" follows con-man Jack (famed for his thieving beanstalk capers, among others) for some years after March's big battle and leaves him hitching farther away. Back to the main drag. Boy Blue, invincibly armed, is in the Homelands, aimed toward the Adversary and offing evil underlings en route. In Fabletown, the sheriff, Beast (Beauty's husband), ferrets out an Adversary mole, and the mayor, Prince Charming, calls in "perpetual tourist" Mowgli to track down absconded Bigby Wolf. Blue winds up in two consecutive stews, and any final ending remains shrouded in the mists of futurity. Lucky us. Ray Olson

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I am on some kind of FABLES kick right now, as I rapidly tear thru the trade paperbacks. FABLES Vol. 6: HOMELANDS collects issues #34-41, opening with Jack Horner's departure of Fabletown and his dubious Hollywood adventures, which span several years (but only two issues). If you like the kind of protagonist Jack is (self-absorbed, scheming, a tad shady), then you might see how Hollywood is a perfect fit for him. It's a fun story arc, and Willingham manages a couple of wicked digs at Tinseltown. Jack does get his comeuppance at the end, and nobody really gets hurt except for several Hollywood low-lives (but, then again, they're Hollywood low-lives). Oh, and Jack turns out to be pretty mean to tiny, pocket-sized Jill, who left the Farm and went with Jack to see the world, only to find the world not as comforting as the Farm (and there's always that bit about having to stay out of sight of the humans). But Jill, in the end, is able to orchestrate her own measure of get-back at Jack. As writer Bill Willingham puts it, "...Jack was never seen in Fabletown again, unto the very end of days." But for fans of this inept trickster, this two-part "Jack Be Nimble" storyline only paves the way for his own series JACK OF FABLES (see Jack of Fables Vol. 1: The (Nearly) Great Escape). From what I hear, it's not half-bad. And then we get into the meat of this trade, the all-important five-part "Homelands," the central figure of which is the surprising Boy Blue, who one day simply left Fabletown. But, hey, a segue: FABLES first introduced Boy Blue as the unassuming but efficient office clerk to Fabletown's administrative offices, and as someone, it seemed, doomed to be perenially relegated to mere background character status. Occasionally, he likes to play moody jazz on his horn. But, hold up. We eventually find out that Boy Blue has had a tragic, bloody

past. And, not one to toot his own horn (hah!), but Boy Blue, in truth, is quite the accomplished warrior. Last featured in *Fables Vol. 4: March of the Wooden Soldiers*, we learned of his part in the fables' last stand in the Homelands and his ill-fated romance with Red Riding Hood. We then learned of how Baby Yaga posed as Red Riding Hood and attempted to invade Fabletown, and how she caught and tortured Boy Blue for days. The invasion was fought off successfully. Boy Blue, in time, fully recovered. "Homelands" is about Boy Blue getting his vengeance on, of an assassination in mind and the quest for the real Red Riding Hood. Armed with the powerful Witching Cloak and the fabulous Vorpall Sword of the Jabberwocky fame (and with his best friend Pinocchio's wooden corpse in tow), Boy Blue cuts a gory swath thru the Homelands, as he goes thru the magical back-alley gateways, each time getting closer to the Adversary's homeworld. It's very neat seeing Boy Blue in this light, as he coolly braves the dangers of the Adversary's conquered kingdoms. Man, there's plenty of bloody snicker-snack! action for those craving sword & sorcery derring-do. And, finally, finally, we find out the identity of the mysterious Adversary, who, after more than a millennium, has only now accomplished the total take-over of the European fable worlds (the Arabian fables are next!). Then, for Boy Blue, there's one final bit of tragedy. Issue #39 is appropriately titled "Meanwhile" as it cuts in the middle of the "Homelands" story arc to catch us up with current doings in Fabletown. In "Meanwhile" Mowgli, one of the Tourists (Fabletown's secret agents sent out into the mucky world), returns to Fabletown on mayor Prince Charming's behest. Charming has a proposition for Mowgli, who, having just discovered that his friend and mentor, Bagheera, is being kept caged for past acts of rebellion (see *Fables Vol. 2: Animal Farm*), is eager to broker a deal to free the proud panther. Also, a traitor is unearthed in the confines of Fabletown. As usual, writer Bill Willingham invests layers of realism and grit and twisted humor into these stories. His "Jack Be Nimble" stretch is particularly snarky. "Homelands" actually comes close to being a throwback to classic heroic fantasy, although Willingham throws in enough of a contemporary perspective to skew the traditional fantasy elements. Again, Boy Blue proves to be a sympathetic lead character and very impressive with the Witching Cloak and the Vorpall blade. David Hahn pencils and inks "Jack Be Nimble," and he shows off his simple, clean lines. But, predictably, it's Mark Buckingham, with inks by Steve Leialoha, who makes you sit up and take notice. His rendering of "Heartlands" is flawless. And, of course, James Jean's covers are worthy of long, long looks. *FABLES* is hands down one of the best comic books currently going on. If you haven't yet checked this series out, you're in for hours of terrific reading. The good news is that it doesn't look like Bill Willingham's run of creativity will dry out any time soon. Hopefully, "happily ever after" is a long ways away.

I continue to really enjoy this inventive and imaginative series. The combination of well-known and lesser-known characters is really ingenious and the story continues to engage and surprise. The Jack storyline at the beginning of this book was, frankly, kind of a throwaway for me. But it is made up for by the balance of the content -- Boy Blue's adventure in the homelands, the reveal of the Adversary's identity, and an exploration of his future plans. Hints about future storylines are revealed. This series started weak for me, but the story continues to grow in complexity and interest.

Volume 6 opens with Jack of the Tales in Hollywood, using the billions of dollars of loot he stole in the last volume to start his own studio. This story (and the entire volume) takes place over a period of years, so Jack's scheme actually works better than most of his previous ideas, though as usual, things don't turn out quite the way he wanted in the end. But tying up many loose threads left dangling in previous volumes, the main star of "Homelands" is Boy Blue. No longer a blues-playing office clerk, in this volume he hacks and slashes his way across the many worlds from which the Fables originally fled, giving us a look at what this fantasy realm is really like and how the Empire ruled by "the Adversary" really works. On his quest to kill the Emperor, we get the answers to many questions, but the war continues, and the future of Fabletown is still an open question. Back home, there are several interesting developments both in Fabletown and up on The Farm. We meet Mowgli of the Jungle Book, who has a conversation with Bagheera (imprisoned since his participation in the failed rebellion in Volume 2) and then is given a secret mission by Prince Charming. A long-time character is revealed to be a traitor, Snow White's children are growing up, and the volume ends with a sad twist. Many subplots from previous volumes have been wrapped up, but plenty of new ones are spawned.

The world of Fables continues to grow with this excellent volume in my favorite graphic novel series. Here we are treated to two major story lines that take us out of the NYC-based Fabletown. One run-away, Jack of Fables, lands himself in Hollywood with enough loot to make a place for himself. Another, Boy Blue, secretly travels to the Homelands, where he undergoes an epic-fantasy-like quest to take revenge and help his friend. Both stories are of the utmost importance for the rest of the series. Jack's exploits in Hollywood actually segue into a whole spin-off series, Jack of Fables (starting with *The (Nearly) Great Escape*), which is also apparently excellent (judging by the glowing reviews here on). Boy Blue's quest into the Homelands is perhaps my favorite story arc so far in Fables. Much is revealed about the Fables' Homelands, as well as about Boy Blue himself.

We finally meet the Adversary, and learn of his plans for the future. Simply put, this is a must read volume in the wonderful Fables series.

Gorgeous Illustration and superb storytelling. I love this series. Will be reading more

I started this series years ago, and then abandoned it - picking it up again has been refreshing. This sixth volume brings a few things I'd suspected to confirmation, and opens up a lot of new plot points. The authors do a great job managing a huge stable of characters and evolving them through some great story arcs.

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