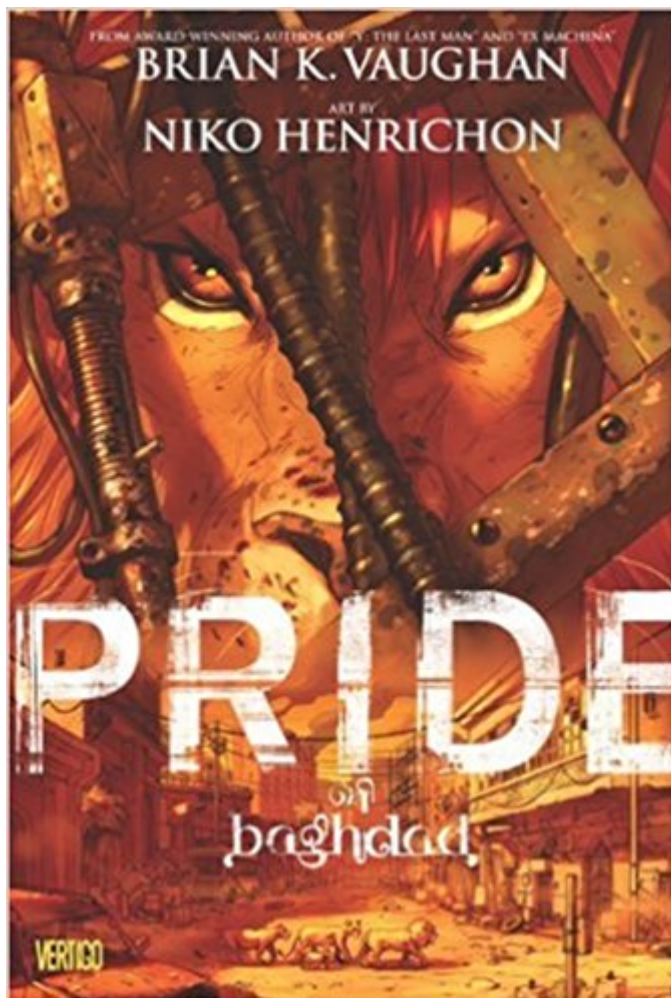


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Pride Of Baghdad



Synopsis

Written by Brian K. Vaughn Art by Niko Henrichon In the spring of 2003, a pride of lions escapes from the Baghdad Zoo during an American bombing raid. Lost and confused, hungry but finally free, the four lions roamed the decimated streets of Baghdad in a desperate struggle for their lives. In documenting the plight of the lions, PRIDE OF BAGHDAD raises questions about the true meaning of liberation - can it be given, or is it earned only through self-determination and sacrifice? And in the end, is it truly better to die free than to live in captivity?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Grade 9 Up "A heartbreaking look at what it's like to live in a war zone. Inspired by true events, this story tells of four lions that escape from the Baghdad Zoo during a bombing raid in 2003 and encounter other animals that offer unique perspectives, such as a tortoise that survived World War I. They begin to question the nature of freedom. Can it be achieved without being earned? What is its price? What do the lions owe the zookeepers who took care of them at the cost of keeping them in captivity? Where should they go? What should they eat? The four lions soon realize that a desert city is nothing like the grassy savannas of their memories. Their experiences mirror those of the Iraqi citizens displaced by the conflict. The book succeeds as a graphic novel and as an account of the current crisis. Henrichon's full palette emphasizes browns and grays that evoke the sands of the country, while his long brushstrokes and careful attention to detail reflect the precise and minimalist dialogue that Vaughan uses. An allegorical tale with compelling and believable characters, Baghdad makes it clear that without self-determination, there can be no freedom" Erin Dennington, Chantilly

I went into this book with HIGH expectations. Sadly, it was nowhere near as amazing as the blurbs on the cover led me to expect. The dialogue feels awkward and contrived at times. I know this sounds weird, but the lions just don't speak the way I would expect lions to speak. It's hard to explain, but something just feels off. There is not much complexity to the characters and their interactions. There is really no character progression. It feels like there should be more there. However, the art is absolutely STUNNING. I almost wish that this story would've been told with no dialogue. Just the beautiful artwork. It was by far the best part. Still, for all of its problems, I did enjoy the book and Vaughn's exploration of power, freedom, and captivity. 3 stars

I think the mark of a mediocre work is that criticism attacks not what it does, but what it does not. *Pride of Baghdad* is, to be blunt, 136 pages that should've been 3 times that. For such a compelling premise, the authors seem rushed. The historical basis plainly states that after several days without eating, the starving lions break free (well, dig free, according to the BBC) and die at the hands of American troops, but the entirety of the story covers a single afternoon, from unexpected threatened starvation to unexpected freedom to unexpected death. This appears nitpicky, I admit, but it seems like the narrative set up requires a sequence of events that could occur over 4 hours or less. As the more negative reviews said, the allegory seems shoehorned in and ham-fisted, the authors always ready to slap you across the face with their meta-story. More frustratingly, the finale follows no build-up, and (since I had not familiarized myself with the backstory ahead of time) incredibly arbitrary, as if the writer had just run out of ideas. Are the lives of anthropomorphized lions so boring that it takes only a few hours to illustrate the entirety of the interesting things they might do in a war zone? Why did they limit the things lions do to just hunting and bickering? Lions are, for instance, legendary sleepers, but the interesting question of "where and how would a lion sleep during a war?" remains frustratingly unraised, let alone answered. The lions themselves are caricatures, one-dimensional cardboard cutouts of characters that neither progress nor show any real depth. There is a clear attempt early in the book to provide some via a flashback, but as the only one, it seems odd that the one they keep depicts lion-rape, and apparently serves as the case-in-point justification for that character's gruff exterior (but not at all her stock-character-required gooeey center). In one instance, a lion sees a painting of a lion with wings, and clearly wants to discuss it, but in literally the next panel, that conversation is cut off by her compatriot's (and presumably the

author's, since the book ends 12 pages later) need to advance the narrative. The authors present an interesting, if Disney-esque idea about the nature of animals in the zoo, some being religious, some acting as petty gangsters, but then completely fail to examine the consequences of those natures. If the turtle has interesting things to say about people and their wars, why not other animals, the birds for instance? The bear in the story explicitly tells us that it knows a lot more about the world than our protagonist lions. Rather than even providing the clichéd monologue of your standard comic book super-villain, the authors cut to elsewhere, where yet another opportunity to fill us in on how the lions are actually responding to the world around them is wasted. As I said, this book is mediocre. I liked it on a panel-by-panel basis, but there is a good idea on virtually every single page that goes unexplored. I don't want to suggest motivations for the authors, but given their track record, I can only assume *Pride of Baghdad's* brevity resulted from Vertigo, the DC imprint dedicated to publishing experimental and long-form books, not wanting to risk publishing an experimental, long-form book.

The story was pretty good, characters were interesting, art was good. However it was printed on just regular paper instead of the nice high gloss thick pages so that's why I gave it 4 stars. Also it just kind of ends. There is a decent beginning and middle part but in my personal opinion, I think the ending was kind of crammed into the last few pages.

An incredibly clever conceit and some truly beautiful art come together to form what is often heralded as one of the best (and most important) graphic novels of the last decade. It's even inspired by real events! And we all know that works inspired by real events are more meaningful, right? So it could be that I came in to this book with impossibly high expectations, but nonetheless, I came away feeling slightly disappointed. First, what works: as I said, it's a very clever idea and by and large it works. *'Pride of Baghdad'* functions as something of a modern allegory about war and is largely successful at not coming across like a polemic. It's hamfisted at times (more on that later), but rarely distractingly so. I've read some reviews that criticize BKV's dialogue, which I thought was just fine and totally suited to the story. One reviewer in particular called *'Pride'* out for making its characters too human, which made the story unbelievable or too cartoonish. I feel you couldn't miss the point by a wider margin. This *is* a cartoon, no different in style than, say, *'The Lion King.'* Of course, substantively the two works couldn't be more dissimilar, and *'Pride'* mostly succeeds at living up to its conceit. What really floored me about *'Pride,'* however, was the art, which was masterfully rendered, from the inking style to the subdued (but incredibly visually compelling) colors.

I was impressed by the artist's take on the animals, and how well he was able to imbue them with intelligence and humanity, which went a long way toward making this book work. Even more impressive, however, was the depiction of Baghdad itself. The city really came to life, and became as much a compelling character as our four protagonists. Honestly, I would say this book is worth the cover price for the artwork alone, which is why it's getting four stars rather than three. Where the book doesn't quite work is its ending. Now, I fully understand that the way things go down is meant to represent the senselessness of war and the thoughtlessness of its perpetrators, and for that to work, what happens *should* be sudden and disorienting. Here, however, it simply doesn't quite work. Such endings can be sudden and disorienting and feel like a sock in the gut while still feeling emotionally satisfying. You can ever trick or shock the reader as long as it feels earned.

Unfortunately, that's not the case here, and the reader is left feeling sort of jerked around. I'm pretty much always down on works that don't reward the audience (in some way--it doesn't have to be via a happy ending) for their emotional investment. In the worst cases, if there is no reward, you just feel sort of used, the butt of a particularly mean practical joke. You feel like the author wasn't engaging in good faith and doesn't respect your intelligence. I'm not going to say that 'Pride' is quite so demeaning or deceitful as all that, but the ending doesn't feel earned, and there is no emotional payoff. It's also where the book is the most heavy handed, where it comes closest to bludgeoning the reader with its perspective on war and humanity. More thorough characterization would have gone a long way toward making 'Pride' more successful. I wish that our protagonists had been given a bit more room to breathe, so that when they finally meet their untimely demise, it hits us like it should. There's also the unfortunate problem of using rape as an easy substitute for back story, which the media in general and comics in particular seem to do a rather lot. (This is a topic I hope to explore further in the near future.) I also wish that BKV had given just a fraction of humanity and character to the faceless soldiers at the end, since doing so would have complicated things in a meaningful way--if we relate to the villains, if we see them as human, it is harder to dismiss them. If we see the villains as aspects of ourselves, we are forced to engage with them. By making the US soldiers literally faceless, 'Pride' makes such moral gray area impossible.

Very well done and heart-wrenching. Reminds me what is between the people of Iraq, divided and dying. Must read for anyone who will be interested in learning another point of view on the war and from one our best story-tellers.

Arrived in a timely manner and was as described in product description.

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