



In the Shadow of No Towers

Art Spiegelman

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Catastrophic, world-altering events like the September 11 attacks on the United States place the millions of us who experience them on the "fault line where World History and Personal History collide." Most of us, however, cannot document that intersection with the force, compression, and poignancy expressed in Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*. As in his Pulitzer Prize-winning *Maus*, cartoonist Spiegelman presents a highly personalized, political, and confessional diary of his experience of September 11 and its aftermath. In 10 large-scale pages of original, hard hitting material (composed from September 11, 2001 to August 31, 2003), two essays, and 10 old comic strip reproductions from the early 20th century, Spiegelman expresses his feelings of dislocation, grief, anxiety, and outrage over the horror of the attacks---and the subsequent "hijacking" of the event by the Bush administration to serve what he believes is a misguided and immoral political agenda. Readers who agree with Spiegelman's point of view will marvel at the brilliance of his images and the wit and accuracy of his commentary. Others, no doubt, will be jolted by his candor and, perhaps, be challenged to reexamine their position.

The central image in the sequence of original broadsides, which returns as a leitmotif in each strip, is Spiegelman's Impressionistic "vision of disintegration," of the North Tower, its "glowing bones...just before it vaporized." (As downtown New Yorkers, Spiegelman and his family experienced the event firsthand.) But the images and styles in the book are as fragmentary and ever-shifting as Spiegelman's reflections and reactions. The author's closing comment that "The towers have come to loom far larger than life...but they seem to get smaller every day" reflects a larger and more chilling irony that permeates *In the Shadow of No Towers*. Despite the ephemeral nature of the comic strip form, the old comics at the back of the book have outlasted the seemingly indestructible towers. In the same way, Spiegelman's heartfelt impressions have immortalized the towers that, imponderably, have now vanished. --*Silvana Tropea*

In the Shadow of No Towers Details

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From Reader Review In the Shadow of No Towers for online ebook

Margie says

Like other reviewers I wanted to like this, but ended up feeling as though it was a bit unfinished. Excellent bits, but I'm not sure they work as a coherent whole. Then again, I don't believe an artistic response to 9/11 is required to be coherent.

Jenny says

What happens when not just your world, but also THE WORLD, fall apart on the same day?

In his introduction to In the Shadow of No Towers, Spiegelman explains the disorientation he felt during the minutes, hours, days, months, and years immediately following the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center. The media images bombarding him and everyone else conflicted with his own experience of seeing the North Tower disintegrate. The clash between reality and memory is something that we can all identify with. What did I actually see, and what am I remembering based on my own reconstruction of events after the fact? Layered onto that common experience, though, is the added experiences and consequent layering of thousands of other people. There is no way to reconcile the two, and that is exactly the feeling that Spiegelman conveys in his ten-page strip on his experience of September 11 and its aftermath.

The format of the strips themselves is disorienting, accurately reflecting and reconstructing for the reader the inner struggles that Spiegelman faced. The pages each contain multiple strips that connect to strips on other pages and that are all related but that don't necessarily connect to each other. The fact that the ten pages were originally serialized in a German magazine makes the disorientation even more explicit. I could read all ten pages in a row, directly after Spiegelman's own explanatory essay, and even I felt the mania and the inner turmoil that Spiegelman meant to convey. I could feel him crying out, like Pilot, "What is truth?" What's real and not real, who is the enemy, what is freedom, what is America?

The book itself is an amalgam of works: two essays, ten pages of original comics, and several reproductions of early twentieth-century newspaper comics in which Spiegelman found some solace when his whole world was falling apart. It's fascinating that every part of the book contributes to the overall theme, from the title and its multiple graphic variations within the text, to the construction of the actual book (mimicking the size and shape of early newspapers and comic strips) to the rear end-pages, on which Spiegelman superimposed headlines from 2001-2003 over the cover of the September 11, 1901 issue of The World. Pure genius.

I highly recommend this book to everyone.

Petra says

This book was too disjointed and chaotic to really enjoy. It's more a bunch of snippets bound together than it is a story.

However, perhaps that's the point? NYC after Sept. 11th must have been chaotic, unsure, paranoid, surreal. There must have been no flow to one's reality or new expectations of what's going on. In that case, this is an exceptional book. It follows completely along these lines.

The graphics are terrific. I especially liked the use of upside down strips: part of a strip is right side up, then it switches to upside down. The world of New Yorkers was turned upside down, so why not the graphic novel telling the story?

This is a book worth checking out but don't expect a straight forward story.

Paul says

Wow. Just find a copy of this book in your library - you don't even have to check it out, as it takes less than an hour to read. Beautiful.

Jen Hirt says

Halfway through this book, Spiegelman, who lives in Manhattan and had to run through the streets on September 11 to get his daughter out of school, writes that the only way he could get the image of burning skyscrapers out of his head was to browse old comic strips: "That they were made with so much skill and verve but never intended to last past the day they appeared in the newspaper gave them poignancy; they were just right for an end of the world moment." And with that, he created 10 graphic memoir panels that capture his mindset, observations, frustrations, and sadness in the aftermath of September 11. Those panels make up the first half, and the old comic strips (from the early 1900s) that he browsed in late 2001 make up the second half of the book. In between the sections there is an essay about the old strips and what they mean to Spiegelman. It's a literary graphic memoir, packed with references, allusions, and the chaos of the post-9/11 city.

The format of the book is inspired, and it underscores the message on each page. It's a huge book, tall like the towers, and on one page the smaller panels are bordered by outlines of the towers. You have to hold the book differently, flipping the pages up and down (instead of left and right). The smoldering skeletons of the towers appear on every page of the 10 memoir panels, sometimes obvious, sometimes more in the background, and the last panel has a bottom border of flames.

On a sidenote, I ordered this book, online, the weekend that Osama Bin Laden was killed. When it arrived, I sat on the couch, reading it, with the news on in the background. It was an interesting confluence, a coincidental retrospective. I think that this is an important book to read now, almost a decade after September 11.

stuti says

art spiegelman deserves his place in the graphic novel canon and can get away with all kinds of pretentiousness (like only giving presentations when he can smoke the entire way through and making a book so big it wouldn't fit in my backpack) bc he's just that good, ok.

Subroto says

I am sad rather disappointed that Art Spiegelman who like million other readers (of Maus) before me had almost started worshipping - wrote this.

As it is - it is so difficult to find a work by this gentleman - and then when you finally get it - it turns out to be no more than a personal document - almost like a diary entry - wavering - intoxicated by paranoia - beautiful in pieces but tremendously shapeless and direction less as a whole.

The book (if one might attempt to call giant size newspaper pages put together in a compendium that) is a personal version of what happened to a John Doe's psyche in America post 9/11.

The first few pages build it up well and just when you thought your fork's going to hit the meat - you find more veggies (no disrespect to vegetarians around the world) and even before I am done understanding that my plate's cleared and the second and the third course of appetizers are again served instead of the main course.

All the appetizers (pages post the mid half of the book) are interesting on their own but do nothing to take the narrative forward.

And then you realize this was not meant to take a narrative forward either.

This is too personal a book for me to like or appreciate.

Sorry Art !

I will forever keep a copy of Maus with me but this I am not so sure about.

David says

Looking for something else in the library, I saw this and thought: "hey, it's 9/11, what better way to mark the anniversary than by reading this book!" So I did, and it is every bit as good as I thought it would be, and more. Art Spiegelman is a genius, and part of his genius is to transform horrible trauma into brilliant art. Another reason to love him is his celebration of the great comic strip artists of the past, which is given magnificent space in the second part of this gorgeous oversize book.

Highly recommended!

P.S. It doesn't take long to read, but you could spend a long time studying these amazing pages.

Sam Quixote says

This is a massive book. Large, almost A3 size planks of cardboard which, when you actually count them, only add up to 10 (albeit huge) pages of Spiegelman talking about his experience of 9/11. What happens is his daughter goes to a school in the WTC. Then the attacks happen. He and his wife run around screaming trying to find their kid and they do. They get to safety. The attacks frazzled Spiegelman and he ended up drawing this vastly overproduced book.

Hardly inspirational or even insightful into that day is it? Lots of people running around screaming, lots of anxiety during and afterwards, and Spiegelman at centre stage talking as if nobody else realises, it was a scary time to be in NY. Really Art? That's it? Rubbish. If he'd never bothered I'd still have what knowledge I

know of 9/11. If you saw any news that day you'd have more knowledge before and after you start reading this.

And worst of all, besides the fact that it's 10 pages - 10 pages!! - of Spiegelman's work, the rest of the book is padded out with old newspaper cartoons from the early 20th century. The book looks thick because the pages are printed from thick cardboard. Believe me, get this out of the library like I did before you shell about £20 on this as you'll think twice before you do.

stephanie says

i don't think i could have read this when it first came out, even if it was three years after 9/11. there is something about Art Spiegelman's work that is profoundly affecting, in ways that i can relate to.

he lives in lower manhattan, and witnessed the attacks first hand. his black-on-black work ran as the cover of *the new yorker* days after the attacks. he talks about his struggle to understand the crisis, to understand and have faith in his country - especially when the decision to go to war happens (the "irakind" is one of my favorite panels - it's a bug with saddam hussein's head).

he is not afraid of showing his cynicism and his fear, and i very much appreciate that. i see so much of my own story in these giant pages, and then at the end, he reflect on the history of comix. i hid in movie theaters, he hid behind old cartoons. and what's amazing is how many of the comix at the turn of the century are relevant today - and also, how sept. 11, 1901 was a pretty terrible year for the world also (mckinley shot and not getting better, the pope still recovering from being shot, emma goldman arrested) and the fact that we still move on.

but what i think was most moving was when he said he finally understood why so many jews didn't flee germany after kristallnacht. a place becomes your home in ways you don't fully understand, and new york will always be something to me that i can't fully describe or pin-point, even if i leave. it's become part of me, like the memories of the falling towers and the bright blue sky and the panic and the smell. and i really, really appreciate the fact that this strange book will stand as a reminder for me; that in fact, i was so not alone in my slow failure to return to normal.

and the art - the art is incredible. reminiscent of Maus in parts, other times he borrows other comix characters. it's just stunning as a historical piece, as a memory piece, as a work of art, as a testament to our city, and as a statement about america and politics and the people that make up our country.

Kim says

Let's terrorize the terrorists!

Yes, I did that. I started off a review about 9/11 with a Family Guy quote. You all saw it. Take my goodreaders badge away.

Too late? When did the satire on 9/11 begin? Is it still acceptable? Let's ask the hipsters.

okaay...

Yes, I laughed at the Family Guy episode. GW refounding the confederacy and starting a 2nd Civil War that resulted in 17 million dead including Cesar Millan.. it puts a nice spin on the 'what happened if 9/11 was thwarted' idea.

I guess I'm just feeling...uncomfortable? lax? unworthy? about reviewing this... I also feel that everything has been said. Jaded. I think that fits. I'm jaded.

Last year I visited the 9/11 Memorial with my two daughters, then 16 and 13.. The line was one of those bank sort of lines where the nylon rope is zigzagged and you're carried like a mouse looking for cheese until you get to the airport like security circus at the end, and through all this, all you see is a baracade. No glimpses of what to come.. My daughters complained about the line to which I gave them my evil stare and then used all my guilt tactics... then ended up telling them to shut the hell up. The mood of the crowd was light... kids were skipping and people were snapping photos... I just stared. I tried to imagine where I used to sit when my husband and I would take nightly walks to the towers. I tried to recall how repulsive I thought they looked at night, big.. well SHADOWS blocking out the sky. I tried to remember hugging one of them and staring straight up and getting dizzy. It wasn't happening. I stared at the two square holes in the ground and saw two square holes. I didn't even take in the installation, the cascading water, the names etched on the side. I do remember the trees. They were so tiny.. and the one tree that had survived the attack and then later survived a hurricane so that it could be replanted and memorialized.. it was tethered with wires, kids were trying to touch it and people were posing in front of it smiling. Jaded.

Spiegelman's story seems just as jaded in his paranoid, neurotic, disillusioned, horrific take on the attacks. He constantly refers to his pivotal image.. *"The image of the looming north tower's glowing bones just before it vaporized"* It is present in each piece and it's beautiful.

He talks about visiting small town America a month after the attack-- *"Still the small town I visited in Indiana--draped in flags that reminded me of the garlic one might put on a door to ward off vampires--was at least as worked up over a frat house's zoning violations as with threats from the 'raghead terrorists.' It was as if I'd wandered into an inverted version of Saul Steinberg's famous map of America seen from Ninth Avenue, where the know world ends at the Hudson; in Indiana everything east of the Alleghenies was very, very far away."*

His references to early twentieth century comics is astute, in a conspiratorial sort of way.. how there are allusions to falling towers...Sometimes I had to put aside my cynicism and see this for what it was.. a scared, but prolific writer, trying to figure out what all of this means and how to survive it.

"Still time keeps flying and even the New Normal gets old. My strips are now a slow-motion diary of what I experienced while seeking some provisional equanimity--though three years later I'm still ready to lose it all at the mere drop of a hat or a dirty bomb. I still believe the world is ending, but I concede that it seems to be ending more slowly than I once thought... so I figured I'd make a book."

Yes, the sky is falling.

Kirsten says

Art Spiegelman uses his considerable talent to illustrate the fear and confusion of September 11, 2001 -- and of the months following, when he (like many other Americans) felt the Bush administration had hijacked the tragedy. The second half showcases the weird and political world of early full-page newspaper comics, his model for his own works in this book. An excellent, important book that moved me to tears.

Rebecca McNutt says

As beautiful as it is shocking, *In the Shadow of No Towers* is a short yet artistic metaphorical graphic novel of New York's citizens coping in the aftermath of the World Trade Center Attacks, and how humans grieve and survive in dire times throughout history in general.

Pramod Nair says

Art Spiegelman & his family witnessed the attack on the World Trade Center Twin Towers at close range from their lower Manhattan neighborhood and his panic, rage, fear, mourning and his overall emotional state just after the 9/11 attacks can be perceived from the following extract taken from the introduction of the book:

I tend to be easily unhinged. Minor mishaps—a clogged drain, running late for an appointment—send me into a sky-is-falling tizzy. It's a trait that can leave one ill-equipped for coping with the sky when it actually falls. Before 9/11 my traumas were all more or less self-inflicted, but outrunning the toxic cloud that had moments before been the north tower of the World Trade Center left me reeling on that faultline where World History and Personal History collide—the intersection my parents, Auschwitz survivors, had warned me about when they taught me to always keep my bags packed.

His teenage daughter was in her school – which was directly below the towers – when the attack happened. The personal horrors that his family experienced and his torment and panic over those chaotic days soon turns into white-hot anger at the U.S. Government, which utilized the events for their own predetermined agendas. Spiegelman who was spending more than a decade before these incidents avoiding creating comix responds with a collection of cartoon strips illustrated in large scale format depicting the 9/11 and it's aftermath drawn from 2002 till September 2003 in a self imposed journey to find solace from the PTSD – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder – that he suffered after witnessing the attacks. His artworks brims with his personal take on the event, his feelings on the horrors of the attack, and his indignation over the ‘hijacking’ of 9/11 events by the Bush administration which he personally believe was for their own imprudent and often morally wrong political agenda.

In order to capture the enormity of the theme he chose to present his works in double spread large-scale pages and found the broadsheet newspaper medium of ‘*Die Ziet*’ the perfect platform to fully express his emotions. In 2004 these collection of original artworks, along with 2 of his essays and 10 old American newspaper comic strip reproductions from early twentieth century where published in a beautifully crafted, over-sized book which opens vertically, and each page made using heavy board stock paper which perfectly confines the work by Spiegelman. This is not a book which describes a linear story, but it is a collection or

rather a collage made out of a selection of artworks and cartoon strips which allows the reader a level of interaction where he can follow the narrations in any order chosen by his own comfort and like a puzzle piece by piece the big picture slowly emerges in front of his eyes.

In **'In the Shadow of No Towers'** Spiegelman brilliantly mixes international and local contexts in the cartoon panels to effectively bring out the personal and political realities of post 9/11 atmospheres. One of the recurring sequences that can be found throughout the book is his "*vision of disintegration*" conveyed through the illustrations of the skeleton of the North Tower just before getting disintegrated, and this shows the feeling of haunting that these events have over the author. The large-scale format of the paper allows Spiegelman to juxtapose his fragmentary thoughts on the event in different visual renderings and styles, which are full of outrage, wit and aggravation. The non-linear way of narration also adds to the depth of the experience. He also inspects the aftermath of the event on the very foundation of American democracy in the form of post 9/11 national security policies through some of the cartoon panels.

Some of the cartoon panels and accompanying text in the book have sharp hints of humor with an undercurrent of melancholy. The panel, which shows a chain-smoking, post 9/11 cartoon mouse version of the author with the following comment is a brilliant example for this.

"I'm not even sure I'll live long enough, for cigarettes to kill me."

'In the Shadow of No Towers' is a perfect example of how graphic novels break the shackles of common misconceptions about the genre and makes a powerful statement by bringing personal emotions of the author blended honestly with historical or political viewpoints in a clear, representational manner. The straightforward nature of drawn images and localized narratives that are offered by the graphic narrative space makes complex socio-political cataclysms more controllable and presentable for the author and this strength of the graphic medium is utilized to the most by Art Spiegelman in this book. 'In the Shadow of No Towers' effectively captures the events and aftermath of the tragic 9/11 attacks in a clever and moving form.

Note: Physically this is a very large book and weighs a lot – almost 1.3 kilograms or 3 pounds – and storage will be a definite issue as slotting it up in a normal bookshelf won't work due to its dimensions. Readers will also find it difficult to hold the book and handle it during reading.

Anne says

I have read several reviews on here that mock Art Spiegelman as "The King" or call his book pretentious or get angry over the fact that it's short or too large in size. But let's get one thing straight here: Art Spiegelman is, without a doubt, just as important as he thinks he is. And this book is further evidence of that.

Other complaints have centered on his strong political beliefs: but, let's face it, he is right. That tragedy WAS hijacked by the right, and the American public was hoodwinked into a costly war that killed far more innocent people than September 11th did, and it lasted over 10 years. So, to be mad at him for that is to be in denial and discomfort of reality.

And even though Spiegelman may be well aware of his genius in the realm of comics and politics, he is never, ever pretentious with his readers: he is honest about his flaws, his insecurities, his paranoia, his obsessions, his weaknesses, his sadness--and that honesty translates into a beautiful and undeniably truthful work of art that captures the chaos and the fear of that historical event brilliantly.

Visually, the artwork is stunning--full color, cardboard pages--rich with symbolism, varied artistic styles, and textured, carefully rendered vignettes about the experiences and his reactions being so close to the event. Every page you turn evokes a breathtaking awe and a gut wrenching reaction.

As for the size of the book, it is HUGE! At first, I got it and thought: oh no! It won't even fit on my bookshelf! I'm going to have to lower one of my shelves just for this book. Why so big? And then I thought about it: September 11th, as an historical event has forced its way into our subconscious--and it's big, bulky, difficult to carry, demanding more and more space in the trajectory of American history and identity as the years go on. For a New Yorker, this must be even more true. The bulk and heft of this book seems appropriate. I made the space for it on my shelf.

Finally, I thought the supplementary material that inspired this work was really interesting for any fan of comics--you can see the way the form has evolved to be imbued with high quality craftwork and social commentary, and in these comics Art gracefully shows how history repeats itself and how comics have been a medium for grappling with complex human emotions for decades.

It's a beautiful piece of art that you can hand to future generations to teach them about the chaos of the moment, the saturated media around the event, and the displacement that occurred afterward that led to many Americans feeling a deep cynicism and shame. It's an important work. Long hail King Spiegelman!

Eve Kay says

Cannot emphasize enough how interesting this work was.

A huge book, the material is more like strong cardboard and the pages are huge 'planks'.

In the first part Spiegelman recounts his emotions during the bombing of the WTC towers on 9/11 and what it all meant to him.

We even get a little glimpse of Maus!

The second part is Spiegelman's picks of comics from the past. To me they are a gateway to the past and a real reflection on today's world.

I can't think of another comic artist to have done such a work before so really Spiegelman created something ground-breaking here.

It just really made me think.

Greta says

**"MISSING
ART SPIEGELMAN'S BRAIN
last seen in lower Manhattan, mid-September 2001"**

"DISCLAIMER:

No creatures, other than the artist, were abused in the creation of this strip."

Jordan says

Incomprehensibly neurotic and strange. Which I can understand, given the subject matter. But also, what did I just read?

The art is beautiful, of course. Just as one would expect from Spiegelman. Here, he pushes the boundaries of graphic novels to create an oversized board book, with intricate frames of Spiegelman's spiral into darkness.

Again, I can see where the neurosis is coming from. I can understand the fragmentation, to a degree. There is a thread of a narrative, as Spiegelman and Francoise rush to find Nadja at her Manhattan school.

But, then, things get REALLY weird. Spiegelman's story is displaced, warped, augmented, what-have-you by vintage (i.e. racist) cartoons from the early 20th Century, and eventually just switches to full-page reprints. Spiegelman explains how he took comfort in the timelessness (?!?) of these political cartoons in the aftermath of 9/11, and explains their merits briefly.

And I'm just left scratching my head.

Joshua Novalis says

"I tend to be easily unhinged. Minor mishaps-a clogged drain, running late for an appointment-send me into a sky-is-falling tizzy. It's a trait that can leave one ill-equipped for coping with the sky when it actually falls. Before 9/11, my traumas were all more or less self-inflicted, but outrunning the toxic cloud that had moments before been the north tower of the World Trade Center left me reeling on that fault line where World History and Personal History collide-the intersection my parents, Auschwitz survivors, had warned me about when they taught me to always keep my bags packed."

I couldn't stay away from Spiegelman for too long. A difficult and unusual work. As always, Spiegelman expertly arranges each page, allowing disparate narratives to play out concurrently, leaving the reader to piece it all together. However, amidst this skillful artistry, I think Spiegelman falls prey to some pitfalls that he deftly avoided in *Maus*--namely, his own hubris and some monologic politicization of events that extend far beyond his finite perspective.

At the same time, this book is a work of trauma. Spiegelman and his family lived these events, so I'm wary to be too dogmatic in pronouncing judgement on a pain I'll never claim to understand. And in that sense, for the reader, "In the Shadow of No Towers" is a healthy exercise in empathy.

Panoramaisland says

Only His High Holiness Art Shpeegleman could get away with something like this: he goes for years without

publishing a whit of comics, drums up all sorts of hype and excitement, and then leaves us with what? Why, a board book! A fancily-printed pamphlet of newspaper pages, 38 cardstock pages total (including the frontispiece, introduction and everything), only 20 pages of which contain his actual original creations. Of course, those 20 pages are all newspaper-style double-page fold-out spreads, so it's really only 10 pages oversize. That means I spent two dollars per newspaper-sized page of comics on this. Mr. Spiegelman loves to be an ego, chain-smoking on stage while he gives lectures in smoke-free lecture halls, and I feel like this format is just another way for him to proclaim his self-importance.

That being said, the book is not without merit. His layouts can be pretty freaking excellent - very communicative, very inventive - and here, they did a smashing job of conveying his paranoia and capturing the general upendedness and gullibility of the nation at the time of the attacks. He seems to be a bit more okay with his own generally assish (I'm coining that word as of now) behavior than I would like, but I suppose that's to be expected. The pages do string together, but they don't really form a story; this book is more a mood-capture than anything.

Spiegelman always says that he views sequential communication skill as being of primary importance, and drawing as secondary. To a good extent, I agree; however, I feel that his work - not just in *The Shadow of No Towers*, but the rest of it as well - really does suffer from that assumption. He is not a bad illustrator, and had he simply put more effort and care into the drawings, he would have communicated the emotion behind his beautifully constructed pages that much better.

Last but not least, I thought the padding - in the form of vintage newspaper comics reprints - was unnecessary. His evolving relationship with vintage funnies around the time of 9/11 was better communicated by the (frankly well-executed) incorporation of those classics into the body of the comics themselves than by including them at the back in an attempt to make the book a bit thicker.

Both Spiegelman's talent and Spiegelman's hubris are quite present in this collection - the latter unfortunately moreso than the former.
