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The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Vol. 1



Synopsis

London, 1898. The Victorian Era draws to a close and the twentieth century approaches. It is a time of great change and an age of stagnation, a period of chaste order and ignoble chaos. It is an era in need of champions. In this amazingly imaginative tale

Book Information

Paperback: 176 pages

Publisher: America's Best Comics; 1st edition (1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1563898586

ISBN-13: 978-1563898587

Product Dimensions: 6.6 x 0.3 x 10.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (212 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

I knew they would never be a sequel to Alan Moore's classic comic series "The Watchmen" (and I wish Frank Miller had let well enough alone with "The Dark Knight Returns"), but certainly "The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen" is a kindred spirit in key regards. If the Watchmen were supposed to be superheroes that we recognized, even though we had never seen them before, then the League offers up recognizable fictional characters that we have never seen together before. Going back a century for inspiration, Moore creates a Pax Britannia circa 1898 where the "superheroes" are fictional characters who had been created by that particular point in time, to wit: Mina Murray (Harker) from Bram Stoker's "Dracula," Captain Nemo from Jules Verne's "20,000 Leagues Beneath the Sea," Alan Quartermain from H. Rider Haggard's "King Solomon's Mines," and the titular characters of Robert Louis Stevenson's "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" and H. G. Wells' "The Invisible Man." There is also reason to believe that "M," the shadowy figure who orders the League about, might in fact be Mycroft Holmes (and if you do not know what literary series he is from then just totally forget about enjoying this series). If that, in and of itself, is not enough of a hook to get you interested in checking out this collection of the first comic book adventure of the League of Extraordinary Gentlemen let me remind you that Alan Moore is doing the writing. The artwork by

Kevin O'Neill is certainly evocative of the turn of the last century, or, more to the point, does not look like a contemporary superhero comic book. Moore and O'Neill also maintain a wonderful conceit throughout the series of presenting the comics as being published at the time of the story, filled with wonderful "ads" that are often as interesting as the story (one of which actually required the initial print run of one of the issues to be destroyed, a story you will have to find related elsewhere, patient reader). Moore's intention was to deal with a superhero group before all the clichés were established (again, similar to how "The Watchmen" was in a different reality unencumbered by the DC and Marvel universes). Seeing an obvious parallel between the Hulk and Jekyll/Hyde, Moore let his imagination roam in his alternate, technically more advanced version of Victorian London. The more you know about literary history from this period (e.g., Emile Zola's Nana is killed in the Rue Morgue by Hyde), the more you will enjoy all this work. But this first adventure for the League still works if late 19th-century fiction is not your forte. British Intelligence has discovered that cavorite, a material that makes flying machines possible, has been stolen by a mysterious Chinese figure (Oh, come on, take a wild guess who it has to be). Captain Bond of MI5 has been ordered to assemble a team of adventurers to retrieve the cavorite, which is crucial to the race to get to the Moon. "The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen" is really much more fun than we usually associate with Moore's work. Certainly his tongue has never been further in his cheeks than with this series. The first three issues of Volume 2 have seen the light of day so far this year and if you read through this original endeavor you can quickly get up to speed with the current adventure. Just remember it is 1898 and Britannia waives the rules...

As a 19th-century scholar, rather than a graphic novel fan, I was prepared to be picky about how TLOEG portrayed characters from "my" era. Boy, was I in for a pleasant surprise. This is clearly the work of someone who not only loves but understands 19th-century fiction, both its enduring appeal and its sometimes exasperating conventions. The shining example of this series' achievement is the character of Mina Murray, the brilliant heroine of Bram Stoker's Dracula. Here she becomes even stronger and more assured, the clear-eyed, coolly efficient leader of this motley crew of "gentlemen." Yet, appropriately and hilariously, the men in the group (who tend to confound Victorian stereotype by being more emotional than Mina) respond to her assertive intelligence by labelling her a harpy, a shrew, a revoltingly "mannish" creature. As far as I'm concerned, Mina is the real hero--and what a hero! Finally, a woman in a graphic novel I can really admire and empathize with. TLOEG offers many such delicious treats for fans of Victorian fiction or intelligent, witty adventure tales. Dig in and enjoy.

I said in my review of Top 10 volume 1 that that was Alan Moore's first super-hero team since WildCATS. I was forgetting this, the very wonderful League of Extraordinary Gentlemen. The idea is simple: during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, tales of heroic fiction were popular. In this series, characters from those tales are brought together for a shared adventure. In this volume, you can see Miss Mina Murray (from Bram Stoker's 'Dracula') leading a group consisting of Captain Nemo ("20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" and "Mysterious Island", Jules Verne), Allan Quartermain ("King Solomon's Mines" and lots of others, H. Rider Haggard), Dr. Hawley Griffin ("The Invisible Man", H.G. Wells) and Dr. Henry Jekyll and Mr. Edward Hyde ("The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde", Robert Louis Stevenson). These characters are such classics that even the most casual of readers will have heard of some of them, and if you are interested in the fiction of that period, it may well be a wonderful treat. As well as these characters, the book is liberally peppered with characters from various Victorian sources, up to and including pornography! Mr. Moore has certainly researched this one closely before applying his wonderful imagination. Having said that, the art by Kevin O'Neill is certainly not completely in character with the art illustrating stories of the period, but Mr. O'Neill has toned down the style he often uses to better suit the content. But wait, there's more: the volume concludes with a text story of Allan Quartermain, which features him in conjunction with Randolph Carter, John Carter and the Time Traveller (created by H.P. Lovecraft, Edgar Rice Burroughs and H.G. Wells respectively) which ties in, at least in part, with the main story. I'd like to reveal the villains of the piece, but that would be telling given that the revelation is part of the story's plot! Good choices, though. And a very enjoyable read.

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