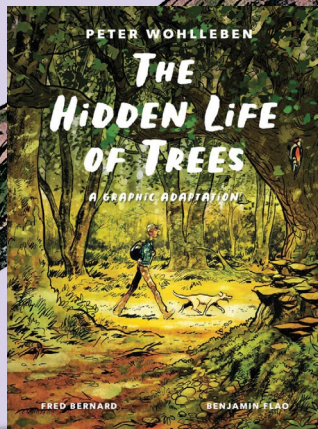


COMICS

PETER DABBENE



& GRAPHIC NOVELS

★ The Hidden Life of Trees A Graphic Adaptation

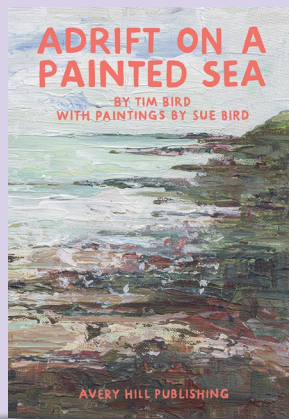
Peter Wohlleben; Fred Barnard, Benjamin Flao (Illustrators), Greystone Books (OCT 29) Hardcover \$35 (240pp) 978-1-77840-165-7, NATURE

The secrets of communication and cooperation among trees and their fungal and faunal allies are revealed in the graphic adaptation of Peter Wohlleben's memoir *The Hidden Life of Trees*.

Wohlleben, who worked as a forester, narrates, sharing fascinating stories about the events that sparked his interest in trees as a child and covering his reexamination of trees' lives as an adult. His book is divided into sections named for the seasons and is full of interesting facts. For example, an oak tree grown indoors will suffer from a lack of "sleep" unless heat and light are removed when the sun goes down. And in forests, fungal networks of mycelia partner with trees to "trade" nitrogen and phosphorus in exchange for carbon.

The subject matter is perfect for a graphic adaptation, as the images enable better understanding of each topic. From diagrams and cutaway views showing underground taproots and mycelia to images depicting the bugs inhabiting the soil, a wealth of visual information is included in conjunction with the text. Wohlleben is depicted at various stages of his life, from his first innocent, awe-inspiring experiences with nature as a child to his time as a college graduate, feeling influenced by the timber industry's emphasis on profit. Late in the book, he's wise, with an enlightened outlook toward forestry and sustainability.

Combining science, a plea for better environmental stewardship, and a sense of wonderment, *The Hidden Life of Trees* is a standout graphic novel examination of trees and their important role in the world.



Adrift on a Painted Sea

Tim Bird, Sue Bird (Illustrator), Avery Hill Publishing (OCT 1) Softcover \$18.99 (84pp), 978-1-910395-82-0 AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

With chapters titled in the style of a radio weather report, which serves as an inspired metaphor for mourning, Tim Bird's graphic memoir *Adrift on a Painted Sea* is a poignant tribute to his mother, a talented artist.

Sue Bird once "filled the house with her art," and her story, told partially in flashbacks, covers her relationship with her son and her painting career. Bird also covers the process of saying goodbye to his mother, who was diagnosed with cancer, with simple observations used to hint at the emptiness of loss: "There are always mysteries—big or small—that go unanswered even when you think you know everything about someone." Subtle lessons on humility and the value of pursuing work that you love without regard for money or fame wend into Sue's story too.

The full-color art juxtaposes Bird's hand-drawn linework to, and sometimes transposes it over, scans of his mother's paintings. Some images morph in style across the pages. Scans of a book that Sue copied images of seashells from are included next to her paintings of the shells. And when Bird shows his mother pictures from a seaside visit, the photographs are incorporated on the page. The cumulative effect of this multimedia approach is warm and intimate.

Adrift on a Painted Sea is a beautiful graphic novel tribute to the life and legacy of an artist and a mother.



How Could You

Ren Strapp, Oni Press (DEC 17) Softcover \$17.99 (224pp) 978-1-63715-526-4, LGBTQ+

A college student and her friends navigate a complicated web of relationships in the graphic novel *How Could You*, a fond, realistic view of early adulthood.

Molly is depressed after a breakup email from Olene, who's away in Europe for a semester. Molly's friend Lou is fresh from a split with Yona, who's rooming with Olene in France. Molly and Lou comfort each other while searching for "rebound girlfriends." Meanwhile, in France, Olene and Yona grow closer. It's a swirl of emotions, attractions, and questions of love—romantic, platonic, or otherwise. Realizations about sexual identity, friendship, trust, and betrayal all play a role as Molly and the others resolve their

feelings about each other and look toward the future, growing toward maturity and self-realization.

The cast is diverse and engaging in this story full of romantic tension, drama, and humor. When Molly decides to cut her hair short after hurt feelings and personal growth, Yona assures her that it, and her heart, will "grow back healthier for sure." And the art is lively and appealing, with inspired use of color: ribbons of yellow flow along with musical notes to show the reach and impact of a song. Key moments are exaggerated for heightened emotional or comedic effect, as with the huge eyes of two curious friends awaiting someone's reaction to a biting comment.

How Could You is an entertaining graphic novel about the pleasures and perils of college romances.



We Called Them Giants

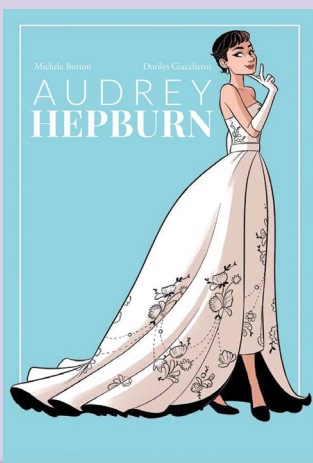
Kieron Gillen, Stephanie Hans, Clayton Cowles, Image Comics Hardcover (104pp), 978-1-5343-8707-2
SCIENCE FICTION

A teenage girl encounters huge, mysterious aliens in the engrossing graphic novel *We Called Them Giants*.

Lori, who is used to being moved between foster families, feels hardened to the world. When she wakes to find that most of the population has disappeared, she reasons that “The rapture is when all the good people disappear. I don’t believe in good people,” so this can’t be that. She and schoolmate Annette team up to navigate their strange new circumstances. On the run from a gang, they witness a pair of giant aliens fall from the sky. Annette is taken by the red giant; later, it saves Lori’s life. Suspicious of the red giant and unable to understand its language or motivations, Lori comes to realize that, despite her initial doubts, the giant is her best hope for survival.

The story is fueled by bold narrative decisions. The mass disappearance of humans and arrival of the aliens are kept mysterious, creating tension and intrigue as people gather information through guesswork and experience. Lori’s emotional breakthroughs and rediscoveries of how to trust are a satisfying second thread. And the illustrations are sleek and dynamic, with invigorating depictions of movement throughout. Their expert showcase of colors emphasizes the contrasts between the bleak, barren environment and the potent, powerful “otherness” of the aliens.

We Called Them Giants is a thrilling graphic novel about alien contact on a postapocalyptic Earth.



Audrey Hepburn

Michele Botton, Dorilys Giacchetto (Illustrator)
NBM (NOV 5) Hardcover \$24.99 (176pp)
978-1-68112-346-2, BIOGRAPHY

The life and work of a movie star and fashion icon are recounted in Michele Botton’s graphic biography *Audrey Hepburn*.

Hepburn was known for her films and sense of style, but the book reveals that there was much more to her. Abandoning her dream of becoming a ballerina, young Audrey took minor roles in films before her breakout role on stage in “Gigi.” With a strong desire to have a family, she sought romance and marriage as her star rose with classic films including *Sabrina* and *Roman Holiday*. Despite her strong dedication to her family and children, two of her marriages failed. Later

in life, she created a new role for herself as a UNICEF Ambassador, traveling the world and drawing attention to the needs of children in developing countries.

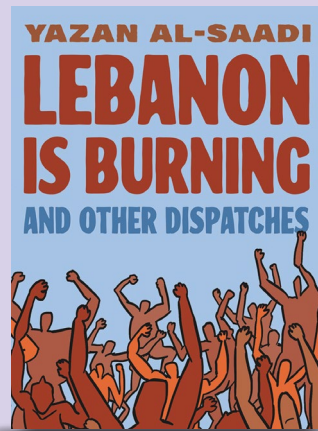
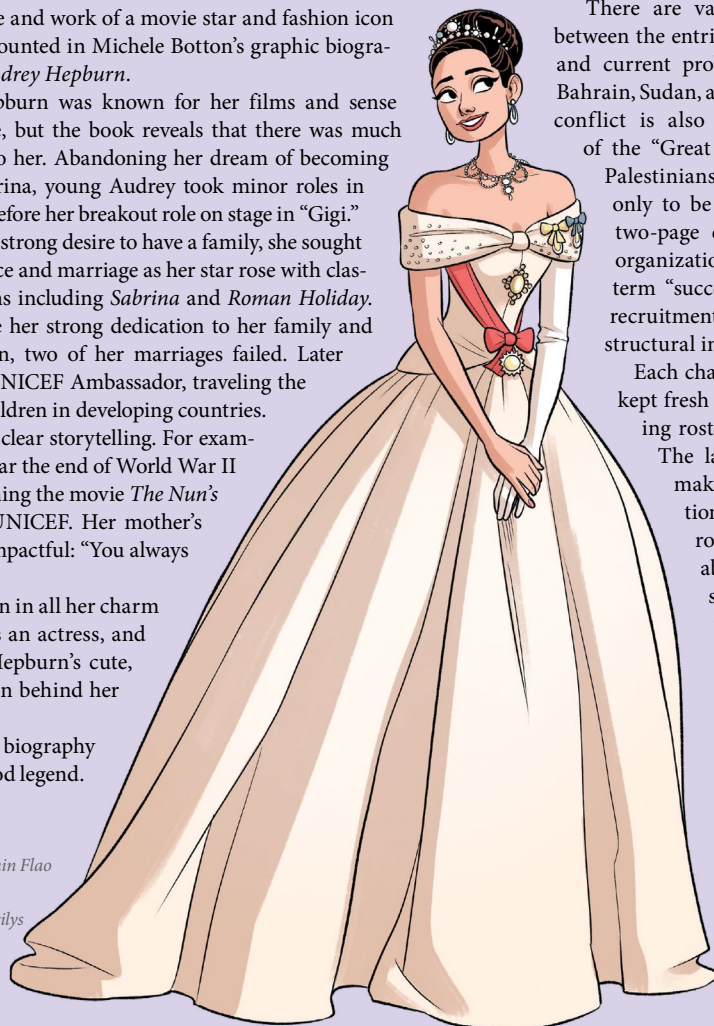
The book connects events across time with clear storytelling. For example, being helped by United Nations workers near the end of World War II and visiting a leper colony in Congo before filming the movie *The Nun’s Story* influenced Hepburn’s later work with UNICEF. Her mother’s words of advice after her father left were also impactful: “You always have to give more love than you receive.”

The full-color illustrations portray Hepburn in all her charm and grace as a child, during her peak years as an actress, and as an older woman. The art style captures Hepburn’s cute, perky personality but also conveys the emotion behind her disappointments and frustrations.

Audrey Hepburn is an enlightening graphic biography about the private and public lives of a Hollywood legend.

Image above left from The Hidden Life of Trees: A Graphic Adaptation, by Peter Wohlleben; Fred Barnard and Benjamin Flao (Illustrators). Used with permission from Greystone Books.

Image right from Audrey Hepburn, by Michele Botton, Dorilys Giacchetto (Illustrator). Used with permission from NBM.



Lebanon Is Burning and Other Dispatches

Yazan Al-Saadi, Graphic Mundi (NOV 19)
Softcover \$21.95 (160pp), 978-1-63779-078-6
HISTORY

Journalist Yazan Al-Saadi’s comics collaboration *Lebanon Is Burning and Other Dispatches* delivers moment-in-time reports from the Middle East.

Beginning with the Lebanese uprisings in October of 2019, the book unfolds events day by day, even hour by hour. Its prose and art capture the uncertainty and suspense of the focal situations. Historical details are included, illuminating the short-term and long-term causes and effects of political discontent.

There are variations in storytelling style between the entries, which explore the histories and current problems of countries including Bahrain, Sudan, and Yemen. The Israel-Palestine conflict is also addressed through the lens of the “Great March of Return,” in which Palestinians attempted to return home, only to be met with force. Elsewhere, a two-page entry criticizes humanitarian organizations for their emphasis on short-term “successes” to drive donations and recruitment, instead of focusing on real structural improvements.

Each chapter stands alone. The book is kept fresh and invigorating by its changing roster of artists, styles, and prose.

The latter is detailed and visceral, making use of firsthand observations and experiences and leaving room for thoughtful questions about the causes and possible solutions to the difficulties that plague the Middle East. References to Chinese philosophy, Galileo Galilei, Jonathan Swift, and Maya Angelou broaden the book’s scope.

An eye-opening tour of troubled events in the Middle East and Northern Africa, *Lebanon Is Burning and Other Dispatches* is an exciting, informative collection of graphic journalism. ♥