



Palomar: The Heartbreak Soup Stories

Gilbert Hernández

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For the first time ever, Fantagraphics is proud to present a single-volume collection of Gilbert Hernandez's "Heartbreak Soup" stories from *Love & Rockets*, which along with *RAW* magazine defined the modern literary comics movement of the post-underground generation. This massive volume collects every "Heartbreak Soup" story from 1993 to 2002 in one 500-page deluxe hardcover edition, presenting the epic for the first time as the single novel it was always intended to be. Palomar is the mythical Central American town where the "Heartbreak Soup" stories take place. The stories weave in and out of the town's entire population, crafting an intricate tapestry of Latin American experience. Hernandez's densely plotted and deeply imagined tales are often compared with magic realist authors like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Isabel Allende (*House of the Spirits*). His depictions of women and Mexican-American experience have been universally lauded as the best examples the artform has to offer. Luba, the guiding spirit of Palomar since the outset, has been hailed by *The Nation*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Time* magazine as one of the great characters of contemporary American fiction. Hernandez's work, in addition to the obvious magic realist comparisons, shares an affinity with other Latin American and Spanish writer/artists, like Frida Kahlo, Federico Garcia Lorca and Pablo Picasso, all of whom applied a surrealist eye to what they saw and experienced. *Palomar* follows the lives of its residents from Luba's arrival in the town to her exit, twenty years later. Included are such classic tales as "Sopa de Gran Pena," "Ecce Homo," "An American in Palomar," "Human Diastrophism," and "Farewell, Mi Palomar." *Palomar* presents one of the richest accomplishments in the history of the artform in its ideal format for the first time, making it a must-have for longtime *Love & Rockets* fans and new readers alike.

Palomar: The Heartbreak Soup Stories Details

Date : Published November 17th 2003 by Fantagraphics (first published July 2003)

ISBN : 9781560975397

Author : Gilbert Hernández

Format : Hardcover 512 pages

Genre : Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, Comics, Fiction, Graphic Novels Comics

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From Reader Review Palomar: The Heartbreak Soup Stories for online ebook

Marley says

So painfully detailed a world, yet the MYTH of it all wraps around you completely. People who call this Marquez-redux are annoying reductionists. Sure, there are tiny hints of the magically real but only briefly, and then the realism is just so sharp and heart-filling that it only seems fantastical. The characters grow and age more truly than any living writer but his brother is capable of (why did they both get that? In the genes, in the upbringing, in the punk scene, in the Oxnard water?). And the succession of changes that hit Palomar make this smarter and wiser every page it goes on; like all great sprawling interpersonal epic (faulkner, say), every little thing comes back eventually, twisted and blown up and reimagined and deeply important.

Extra kudos for "An American in Palomar" about an exploitative photographer who thinks he can get a good series out of "the impoverished natives" while getting a good lay out of the town girls--and even more praise for not letting it drop, bringing the consequences back years later in a completely unexpected way.

Todd N says

It was supposed to rain all weekend (again), so I went to the library and stocked up on graphic novels. Palomar is probably the best graphic novel I have read. I stayed up reading it until 6:00am -- something I haven't done in years.

Palomar is a fictional Central American town that is isolated and somewhat left behind in time. The sheriff and some other people have a debate over whether or not to get a telephone. The owner of the movie house wonders why Bruce Lee hasn't put out any movies in a while. When a visiting photojournalist mentions that he died a while back, she asks him to keep it a secret.

The book is densely plotted and densely peopled with characters that you wind up caring very deeply about. Women are the strongest characters in the book. They come in all shapes and sizes and are seen from every angle.

I've always been a fan of Hernandez Bros. style -- the way a simple line can convey such a range of emotions, the way the frames are jammed with so much humor and life.

The stories jump around in time, so you see the town and its people at different stages in their lives and friendships. For some of the stories you wind up knowing more than the characters, which adds to the tension. In the middle of the book there is a long story called "Human Diastrophism" in which a plague of monkeys, archeologists, and a serial killer invade Palomar straining the dynamics of the town and revealing a lot about the characters. As counterpoint to the story, clueless white surfer tourists are oblivious to what's going on around them. (Nothing personal, white devils!)

This is the kind of book that you want to race through for the plot but you also want to slow down to hang out with the characters more.

Michael Beblowski says

Although I read Gilbert Hernández's 600 page collection entitled Luba, the busty and hammer wielding heroine and former mayor of Palomar, before tackling this preceding volume, neither The Heartbreak Soup Stories or Luba in American necessarily needs to be read in sequence. Palomar: The Heartbreak Soup Stories is written like an erotic telenovella as conceived by Pedro Almodovar and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. This small impoverished South American town is full of wonderfully eccentric characters. The artwork is stunning!

Famousperson says

I used to prefer Jaime's talent over Gilbert's, but once I read all the Palomar stories together, as a unit, they all made so much sense and were absolutely enthralling. Now I am almost as big a fan of Gilbert's! I would definitely suggest reading the L&R series this way, as opposed to the original comic form, because a reader won't get as distracted by Los Bros. very different styles of storytelling, both of which are unparalleled in the comics world today.

Valerie says

I didn't enjoy this book as much as I expected to. but i don't enjoy many things since i'm still somewhat depressed. but also, i think i've grown out of certain comic books. god that sounds so sad. i did like it though and felt compelled to finish. actually one of the most unpleasant aspects of reading it was the fact that it was so goddamned heavy! I like to read on my back in bed and propping up this mother fucker was not easy. i feel like i care about the characters, but not as much as before. i was sad and curious when it ended, but perhaps not curious enough to go out and buy more stories.

Addendum: I did end up going out and buying more stories.

Hannah says

Yesterday I stopped myself from shouting across the kitchen, "Omigod dad, listen to what Tonantzín just did!" I guess that's pretty emblematic of the way that Palomar became a very real place to me. The characters evolved beautifully, both textually and graphically, and the narrative grew deliciously more complex from story to story. I had some questions about agency and objectification (esp. re: gender); both are complicated by the graphic novel form I think, and I'd love to hear others' thoughts. I heartily recommend these stories, and I recommend starting at the beginning.

Chris Heaney says

This is a wonderful and huge collection of a series of comic book stories set in a fictional Mexican small town named Palomar, written/drawn from the early eighties through the late nineties by a Mexican-American artist named Gilbert Hernandez. To answer the inevitable eye-raise -- this is a comic for adults -- and to

address the obvious comparison -- Garcia Marquez's Macondo has nothing on Hernandez's Palomar. The latter is beautiful, I remember, but so baroque and unreal. Macondo, however, bleeds, drinks, screws, cheats, loves, fights without anyone growing a pig-tail or anything. It's funny, and grotesque. In this town, no one is carried away by butterflies -- instead eyes are plucked out by crows.

That's not to say this is a gory comic or that there's no surrealism; rather, it has sudden flashes of violence that are truly scary, mostly because they happen to characters you've watched grow before your eyes; its sudden flights into the unreal, in dreams and hallucinations, are the more effective for that. I can't remember being afraid that any of Garcia Marquez's characters might die, but I did here. By the time I was through, and had seen characters move away, return, marry, die, mess up, get a little redemption, I felt like I had a whole new set of friends in my head. Is it too much to note that I only ever normally say that about Tolstoy?

(One last thing: the majority of the characters are women, which is one of the greatest recommendations I can make for any of the Los Bros. Hernandez's work. Their women are the engines of their art, and not in a distant, idealizing, muse-like way. They age, their bodies change with time as they have children, have accidents, begin to worry. Some cry, others never do. They breathe!)

Chad Jordahl says

Well I cannot imagine why this gets so much praise. I'm going to have to read some admirers' reviews. I *suspect* that this series looked better in relation to the contemporaneous comics of the 80s and 90s.

My main beefs...

- 1- It's a 522 page graphic soap opera. Melodramatic and absurd.
- 2- The humor was too often silly and cartoonish, like old time comic strip gags. Goofy characters mugging to the fourth wall.
- 3- Much of the dialog is characters straight up explaining what they are doing and thinking.

I did finish the book, but it took a real effort.

Ted Child says

“Heartbreak” is right. This book is magic realism at its strongest. Having just reread Watchmen recently I know better than to call Palomar the greatest graphic novel I’ve ever read but it surely is one of the best. One of the more effective devices Hernandez uses, purely magic realism, is of the tree with the ghosts of recently passed characters waving from its shadow. The second time it is used is how we find out one of the main characters is dead and this is heartbreakingly effective. Hernandez does this again later in the book with almost equal effect. The realism of this book is potent, the characters full with life, change, death and error, all the characters the reader empathizes with showing us brutal human faults (Luba abusing her oldest daughter) while the beasts that we at first hate end up being just as full of human life and character (many but I would point out wife-abusers Satch and Gato and how they change). Palomar is storytelling at its best, graphic or otherwise. The book store shelf is crowded with writers trying to write as effective, emotional and potent as Hernandez, who, in every sense, is the real deal.

sweet pea says

an amazing collection. the brilliance of this work is best felt not while reading it, but while you're not reading it. when you're constantly thinking about the characters, their lives, and eating fried slugs. populated by strong womyn of all sorts, the palomar stories have everything one could desire. the characters' histories slowly unfold as the comics continue - things hinted at and touched upon are slowly revealed. shifting alliances, shifting sexualities, and shifting power feed the drama. although the length of the book seems daunting, it is a treat to see the characters variously evolve and devolve as time marches on. highly recommended.

Dov Zeller says

There is so much curiosity and wisdom about relationships in this book. I love witnessing the unfolding of stories over time in varying narrative modes. We often get to meet a character and see them in action, sometimes in ways that might lead us to make judgments about them. And a little later on their story deepens and sometimes even shifts significantly. We get the richness of knowing people from seeing them in different stories at different angles. Because Palomar is a small place, we get to see how everyone experiences each other over time, their interweaving and shifting (or inflexible) dynamics, loves, losses, disappointments. Palomar is no paradise, but it is a home for the people in this book, and therefore, even with its hardships, it is a cherished and important place. Gilbert Hernandez dignifies Palomar and all of its characters even as he allows them to be fully human and therefore deeply fallible. The book is sad, funny, philosophically rich, full of friendship and the absurd intensity and cartoonishness of friendship and romantic love over time. I recommend this book.

Jason Pettus says

(Reprinted from the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography [cclapcenter.com:]. I am the original author of this essay, as well as the owner of CCLaP; it is not being reprinted here illegally.)

Regular readers know that I make my way through graphic novels on a pretty regular basis, usually only ten or twenty pages at a time while in bed at night; and hey, what should just happen to pop up at my neighborhood library the other day than the collected "Palomar" stories from legendary '80s and '90s comic *Love And Rockets*, only a handful of which I'd ever sat down and read from cover to cover before. (Or, actually I cheated a little -- the book I came across randomly was merely volume one of a brand-new paperback collection by its publisher Fantagraphics, being offered as a cheaper and more mobile version than the all-in-one coffeetable-sized hardback collection they put out in 2003; when I discovered that the Chicago Public Library has not yet acquired volume two of this new paperback series, I simply checked out the larger hardback version, and finished up the stories that way.) For those who don't know, the original *Love And Rockets* consisted of several different persistent storylines, each of which was run by a different member of the multi-sibling Hernandez family, who as a group originally created and funded this historically ultra-important title from the dawn of alt-comics; the "Palomar" stories (named after the town where they take place, also known as the "Heartbreak Soup" stories after the very first tale in the series) was the one maintained by brother Gilbert, an expansive look at a fictional village somewhere on the west coast of Central America, and all the remarkable things that happen there from roughly the 1950s to 1980s (and sometimes both before and beyond).

And indeed, the entire series as a whole is still a remarkable read, just as sharp and entertaining as when the stories first started appearing nearly thirty years ago; because by concentrating on the long-term fates of dozens of Palomar's citizens, as they mature over a dense 600 pages from childhood to middle-age (or from middle-age to death in the case of the main characters' parents, or from birth to puberty in the case of their kids), combined with a healthy dose of magical realism (inspired by the Latino-American artist's obsession with Gabriel Garcia Marquez), Hernandez turns in a saga much more timeless than his '80s contemporaries, ultimately a story about family that now holds up much better than the instantly dated punk-rock tropes of, say, peer Alan Moore from the same period. (For example, just try reading Moore's early-'80s *V For Vendetta* anymore without its naive anarchist political posturing making you want to burst into unintended laughter on a regular basis.) It's this original attention to classic detail that makes the Palomar stories still so enjoyable, and what has kept *Love And Rockets* still so well-known and influential even decades later, when so many of the other roughly-done black-and-white comic-book experiments from the period have by now fallen into near-total obscurity.

Out of 10: **9.4**

Max says

There are some things where the view from the outside is fundamentally different from the view from the inside. When it's been a while since I've read these stories, it can be difficult for me to remember what I loved so much about them. Then I pick the book back up, and gradually I remember more and more, and by the time I'm reading "Human Diastrophism" the world of Palomar feels more real than my actual life. This would be worth reading just for the amazing characters Beto crafts (Heraclio and Guadalupe being personal favorites of mine), and the storytelling and cartooning only make it better. A landmark.

Mark says

So this is the great Latino graphic novel epic. You read any book about graphic novels and you're bound to come across a whole chapter on *Love and Rockets*. It's been canonized for a number of reasons, including the fact that it's Latino and features strong female characters at its narrative.

First the art. There's a large Steve Ditko (co-creator of Spiderman) influence, especially in the early stuff: sharp chiaroscuro, simplified, minimalist figures and faces, hybrid cross between cartoons and more realist representation. I can also detect the presence of manga in the hyperbolic emotions, crowd scenes—the mark of Tezuka here and there. The superhero influence of Ditko matched with the prosaic locale and often sleazy subject matter creates a certain cognitive dissonance—a very postmodern mélange of styles.

It's interesting to watch the characters age—another feature almost totally lacking in the superhero comics where Aunt May always looks ancient and Mary Jane never starts to sag. The storyline is very soap operish—the sexcapades of a small Latin American town (Mexican?). Sex occupies the absolute center of this tale. Women are always having babies out of wedlock and seem to have no problem raising them on their own. Take the mega-breasted Luba, the Earth Mother of Palomar. She has sex with just about everybody, has half a dozen children all by different fathers, and is a successful businesswoman and eventually the mayor of the town. While it's certainly a depiction of a matriarchal society, it's also a fantasy of matriarchy—where women, especially young nubile girls, are always sexually available to ugly older men like Guadalupe and Pipo to Gato or Tonantzin to practically everybody.

After a while I got kind of sick of the same old soap opera antics. Who's screwing who gets to be a little tired. Their domestic lives appear to be the only things of any consequence. And what annoys me is how much sexism and the machismo of Latino culture is elided by the portrayal of these superstrong women who are always drawn (except for the lesbian Maricela) in the glamour-style of comic book babes: huge bosom, perky nipples, big butts, gorgeous faces and hair, long legs, and so forth. Luba is the only one who is grotesque, with "chicken legs" and morbidly large breasts. The storylines can get superficial and very sketchy.

Hernandez has a twisted side. In one story, Toco, Jesus' mentally-challenged brother, is drawn as cartoonishly as possible, molested by a pedophile in a movie theater, and then dies. The comic nature of the illustration seems perverted—as if Hernandez was simply trying to get a rise, a shock out of people. No Velazquez here, with a hint of pathos for the people he depicts. On the other hand males appear imperfect, like Vicente with his deformities, or Khamo with his horrid burn scars. Everybody takes these in stride and he's always accepted by the others for it. The women, on the other hand, have no such imperfections, except for Chelo's mysterious loss of an eye, which at least in this book is never explained.

The village seems to operate almost autonomously and in that sense reminds me of Cicely, Alaska, a quaint, quirky place where everyone knows and cares about everybody else. There's a healthy disdain for US culture, as befits the Global South. Nevertheless one thing that's annoying is the relative lack of politics in the series. There's no discussion of the quality of education these people receive or how this squalid village life is enabled by the globalizing power to the north. People like Pipo cross the border effortlessly and despite Pipo's complete lack of schooling and that she's saddled with a kid as a teenager, she's able to effortlessly create a clothing line and get a TV show by virtue of her good looks, large ass, and perkiness. In short there's nothing particularly realistic about Palomar—it's a telenovella fantasy—a Univision soap opera mixed with Northern Exposure, call it Southern Exposure. The characters are all limned over years, but in a way you get to really know only a few of them. Luba is certainly the dramatic focus, along with Heraclio. They appear to embody the author's self/preoccupations the most. The rest are more or less cardboard stereotypes, and their children are not nearly as interesting.

Hernandez was taken by punk music so it's no surprise that some of the punk ethos filters into the work—the in-your-face sexuality, the deliberately frank homosexuality—which I suppose was rather subversive vs. the macho Latin culture. But the recaps, which occur rather often, the recitations of the back stories get tedious. And the fact that the ensemble cast gets ever larger means that there are increasingly more superficial character sketches versus a more concentrated study of a few of them.

Reading 500 pages of it does wear on you after a while, if only because the same guys are still screwing the same girls—or have moved on to their daughters. The women who have horrendously bad taste in men seem never to really suffer for it and bearing one child after another apparently doesn't hold them back, except for a brief moment when Luba loses it and returns the various kids to their Dads—men who never seem to have to accept responsibility for fathering children.

While I think the series was an important step toward breaking comics out of the superhero serial mode and also giving minorities a voice, I think there are probably better visions of Latin America waiting to be discovered or created—the sort of stuff that is willing to confront the darkness and depth that lies at the heart of their culture rather than quasi-pornographic celebrations of liberated female sexuality that nevertheless apologize for and naturalize patriarchy.

Marisol says

I've never had an army buddy. (Do you have to be in the army to have an army buddy? Can I have Buster Bluth then? He was never really in the army either. Or I could just show up to the reunions. "Remember when we ate crappy food and I stole the picture of your girlfriend? Private Pyle was such a turd! I turned into a girl because Sarge called me lady so much. I realized I kinda liked it.") (I do have a thicker than blood blood-ties with my twin. We were even in the womb together. Womb buddy? It's bloody.) What I have are the cast of characters from the Hernandez brothers Love and Rockets comics. I'd never go on without them if they got shot; I'd deliver a note to their loved one; I'd carry them over trenches and past enemy lines (boy do I suck at allegories. I'm awesome at having allergies. Noses run in my family). Whitney Houston's greatest love of all. You can't take them away from me. Anyway, it'd be good to have that easy-to-pinpoint relationship term such as "army buddy" because people would go "ooh yeah I get it" right away. Instead I get to struggle over my feelings and scattered thoughts again. I'm not good at explaining it. So... They made me happy. They made me sad. I felt like I honest to god knew them because of how they grew on the pages. I was moved by their struggles, forward and backward paces (childhood and adult stories are interspersed in a way that makes it all make bloody sense). These characters are with me forever, thank goodness. I need 'em. (Beto is my favorite. Sorry, Jaime.)

But uh.... I won't eat their fried slugs.

Ew! I know that I'd still be the asshole who won't eat the food no matter how hungry everyone is. That scene in Empire of the Sun (everything I need to know in life I learned from Empire of the Sun) when they eat the weavils in the rice to get protein? I wouldn't do it. I'm the sister Katsa in Nicolas Gage's Eleni (best book in the world that people refuse to read). Yuck! I can see it now: "It tastes like chicken, Marisol!" "But I'm a vegetarian!"

Other things they could've fried than banana slugs:

1. Sea slugs.
2. Snooty French food.
3. Slughorn from the Harry Potter series. He was fat enough to feed the whole town.
4. Slugworth from Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. Maybe he'd taste like candy.
5. The chorus from Flushed Away film.

The prison scenes were creepy as hell. I've found myself thinking about them when reading other prison stories. (Not the love scenes! I swear!) (Maybe those too.) Walking around outside in the prison island and if you walked the line of the Earth you would end up back where you started: prison.

I also loved the photographer that tells the one girl she looks like Sophia Loren and she has no idea who that is. Somehow, in her mind, that translates into a future of a bright movie career. And the asshole photographer plans on exploiting them for his photo essays in a magazine. The creep! I loved how vulnerable and picked back up they were in a not Lion King circle of life pat way but that's what usually happens and it still kinda sucks way.

And the young hooker competing with the old town hooker (one of the only people who has any money at all). She takes baths with her clients. Personally I find that a little creepy and thought she deserved to be paid more.

The kids were the best parts. Any one of them would have been great to have as a buddy (but NOT to date. That there leads to heartbreak).

