



# The Golem's Mighty Swing

*James Sturm*

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## **The Golem's Mighty Swing** James Sturm

James Sturm pens this richly evocative graphic novel set in the 1920s. The Stars of David, a barnstorming Jewish baseball team, travel from town to town earning a living by playing local squads. They all sport beards, a gimmick to attract patrons but when financial difficulties threaten to end their season they cast their lot with a Chicago promoter who has just seen the hugely successful German silent film Der Golem... With the golem, a baseball game is transformed into a mythical pageant. Fear and curiosity fills the stadium, but it also stokes the flames of anti-Semitism. Winning the game for the Stars of David becomes less important than surviving it. With a sepia-tinted cinematic style, this compelling book reminds us that making it home is at the heart of baseball.

## **The Golem's Mighty Swing Details**

Date : Published May 1st 2003 by Drawn and Quarterly (first published 2001)

ISBN : 9781896597713

Author : James Sturm

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Genre : Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, Comics, Sports and Games, Sports, Historical, Historical Fiction, Baseball, Fiction, Literature, Jewish

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## From Reader Review The Golem's Mighty Swing for online ebook

### Sean says

It's not often I hand out a 5-star rating to a graphic novel, but *The Golem's Mighty Swing* definitely earned it. The seemingly deceptively straightforward and unfussy art wonderfully conveys the sense and spirit of barnstorming baseball, via a travelling team known as Zion's Lions, all of whose members, except for one, are Jews. The story itself find no need to club (pardon the pun) at its intro the reader over the head with its tale of lurking anti-semitism and racism.

What is remarkable about this novel is that it depicts a time in American history when baseball might have been one of those remarkable areas that best served to assimilate the people of the U.S. Listen to a bit of dialogue:

Moishe (Mo): (holding an apple) "... now Dutch Leonard, he spreads his fingers wide like this ... he'll come sidearm or over the top ..."

Local butcher: "Leonard will mix in the splitter too. Seen Cy Young go up against Kid Nichols in Cleveland over twenty years back, some game ..."

Another local, an old guy: "Them boys couldn't hold a candle to John Clarkson!"

And so on. But what's sad is the prelude to this scene, and much of what comes after. That "after", introduced simultaneously as this scene, but in a separate location, begins with the introduction of the Golem.

Here, of course, the Golem is placed in a modern setting, where the mythological creature isn't actually the creation of the Jews, but of a huckster showman. Even more so, the Golem--in this case, the lone black man, who passes as a Jew, on the Jewish baseball team, Zion's Lions (I love the name)--is a creation not only of Jews or any showman, but also of anti-semitism itself. That I believe is Sturm's greatest insight.

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### Victoria says

This is great. Baseball, racism, anti-Semitism, histories we ignore, very good art.

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### Vi says

race relations. told in two parts.

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### Bruce says

Narrated by Noah Strauss or as he calls himself "the Zion Lion," manager and third baseman for the Stars of

David minor league baseball club touring and playing other teams sometime in the early decades of the twentieth century. When the Stars of David, "The Bearded Wandering Wonders," are hit with a perfect storm of economic woes, they turn to a promoter who proposes dressing their one African American player, Henry, or as he's known on the field, "Hershl Bloom (member of the lost tribe)," into the costume of a golem to bring in the crowds and enrich the box office, and in turn the team. It's a plan that has unanticipated results. Strum's well-crafted and drawn story portrays American small town life with the unifying social mores of baseball and the divisive mores of antisemitism and racism.

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### **catechism says**

Why did I read this? I don't like baseball.

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### **Reuven Fischer says**

A secular Jewish Minor league team discovers there are no atheists in the dugout. The Golem's Mighty Swing looks at the religious tensions encountered by The Stars of David, a Jewish touring Minor League baseball team in the 1920's. With a lot of Play-by-Play action, this book should be a hit with Baseball fans, The anti semitic tensions coupled with the teams secret weapon... A "Golem" makes for an exciting story. The last section of the book appears to be filler loosely based on the main story. I thought this took away from the book. I would have enjoyed the book more if it was left out... A Good Read

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### **Kathrina says**

This took less than an hour to read. I don't care much for baseball, but the racial tensions expressed through historical American pop culture are compelling, and the art and simple storytelling are mesmerizing. Kind of frustrated the story ends so abruptly, but I get that's how serial novels keep you hooked. Not sure this is the right book for young reluctant readers; seems more to serve the interests of mature readers with some facility with the historical context.

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### **Zach says**

Solid graphic novel about a travelling Jewish baseball team in the 1920s.

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### **Matthew Metzdorf says**

The ending feels like someone tore out the last 20 pages but this was a great graphic novel about a traveling Jewish baseball he in the 20s

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## David Schaafsma says

In Jewish folklore, a golem is an animated anthropomorphic being that is magically created entirely from clay or mud. Sturm's narrator has it: "A golem is a creature that man creates to be a companion, protector, servant. . . . " but because they have no souls. . . . "eventually they become destroyers."

James Sturm, the Director of the Center for Cartoon Studies, is the author of *Market Day*, the *Adventures in Cartooning* series and *Satchel Paige*, many years a star of the Negro League who finally made it to the majors. Anyone who has heard of Satchel Paige, or Jackie Robinson, knows America's "National Pastime's" inescapable history of racism. *The Golem's Mighty Swing* is a story of a traveling baseball team of Jews in the 1920s, and the target of anti-semitism. It was also a team that caved in to a huckster who advised them to have the one black member of the team dress as a Golem, to get more fans into the park when they rolled into town. Fans came to see the monster play and crush the opposition, which he often helped his team do.

The baseball aspect of the book here—according to this reviewer, who loves baseball and its history--is terrific, a very entertaining story, and the historical grounding of the sport in part in racism is also compelling. I have read stories of Jackie Robinson, Satchel Pzage, the Negro Leagues, and this is a similar story. What's more important, winning the game or surviving? The art is terrific, from a master at his craft, spare and subtle, not (as the title might suggest) cheesy and juvenile. The effect is more like of a Yiddish tale with some suffering, some hilarity. The ending is a bit abrupt, but I still thoroughly enjoyed it.

The Stars of David is not to be confused with another religion-based team, The House of David, a Seventh Day Adventist team:

<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/201...>

Nor is it the Israelite House of David Baseball club of the 1930s, known also as the "Jesus Boys":

<http://www.maryscityofdavid.org/html/...>

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## Tony Cafiso says

*The Golem's Mighty Swing* is a story about the first Jewish baseball team. It goes into detail on two games in specific and the bad experiences they had in one certain town that they played in. To summarize, other players and fans all hate them because they are Jewish. One player gets beaten up pretty badly at a bar in town and the next day many of the fans jump down from the stairs and try to attack them during a game. It is always interesting to learn about baseball back when it was just starting and compare it to baseball today. The way players were treated for example, I can't believe that players were that badly just for being Jewish. Today in baseball, players are practically treated like gods and payed a thousand times more than what they were payed back then. I would recommend this book to anyone interesting in the origins of baseball.

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## BookwormJH says

Graphic novel about a 1920s Jewish barnstorming baseball team. A good baseball book and a look at the racism and anti-Semitism prevalent at the time. The first half is stronger than the second half. Unfortunately,

there was not a single female character in the entire book. Not one.

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## **Habemus\_apicellam says**

### **Quando il baseball era un circo e gli ebrei erano freaks**

Un bianco-e-nero forte e antico che arriva dai primi anni del secolo in una America rurale, primitiva e terragna. Il “national past-time” diviene il campo dove le pulsioni più reazionarie e conservatrici dell’ America profonda si sfogano e qualunque minoranza che tenta di correre sulle basi rischia grosso. In questa vicenda è una squadra di ebrei che viaggia nel MidWest incontrando (e sconfiggendo) squadre locali, dannandosi per mettere insieme il pranzo con la cena. Un impresario propone di aggiungere un po’ di spettacolo inserendo nel *lineup nientemeno che il Golem, ma alla fine sarà proprio grazie a questa squallida trovata che il team eviterà il linciaggio da parte dai buoni americani patrioti....*

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## **Stacey says**

This was a little odd. First, it was definitely not what I expected out of James Sturm, mostly because I'm familiar with him through Adventures in Cartooning. I get that it's a historical fiction comic book, but it still didn't really hit home for me - it felt like there were pages missing here and there, because there wasn't necessarily a clear through-line from some parts to others.

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## **Cameron Booth says**

Quick read, enjoyed it. Interesting story

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