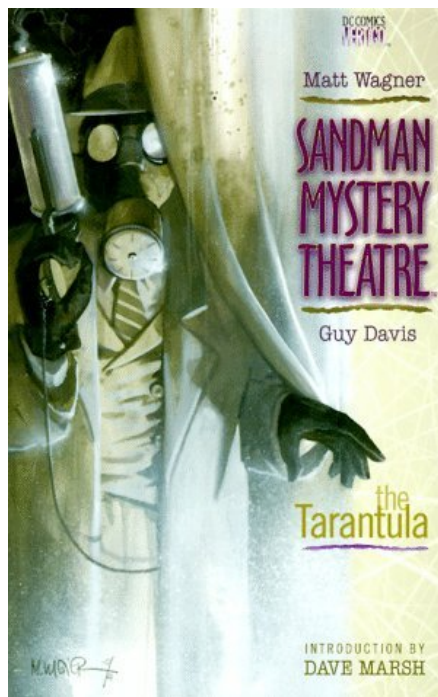




Sandman Mystery Theatre, Vol. 1: The Tarantula

Matt Wagner , Guy Davis (Illustrator) , Dave Marsh (Introduction)

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In this noir detective tale of intrigue, bigotry and incest, millionaire Wesley Dodds takes on the costumed persona of the Sandman to catch a sadistic killer in 1930s New York. Donning a gas mask, fedora, business suit and cape, Dodds goes after the Tarantula, a brutal kidnapper who is mercilessly preying upon the women of high society. But as the Sandman walks through a world of corruption and deceit, he uncovers the true secret of the murders and their implausible connection to the city's most prominent family. SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS.

Sandman Mystery Theatre, Vol. 1: The Tarantula Details

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Author : Matt Wagner , Guy Davis (Illustrator) , Dave Marsh (Introduction)

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From Reader Review Sandman Mystery Theatre, Vol. 1: The Tarantula for online ebook

Zardo says

1930's Noir with a vigilante detective/wealthy do gooder solving crimes. Sounds pretty tame, but definitely has some dark moments. Not your typical graphic novel. This volume contains three different story arcs that involve torture and sexual abuse of a minor, so not for the kiddies.

Raymond Rose says

Sandman Mystery Theater is a bizarre beast. The Sandman it is referring to was a character created in the 1930s, a strange pulp novel character of the newly-created comic books at the time. In the 1980s, Neil Gaiman took the character and updated him... as a god of dreams. He stated that the 30s Sandman was created when Gaiman's Sandman was imprisoned by faux-magicians. With the success of Gaiman's Sandman, DC set up to try their hand at the 30s Sandman again.

And, oh my God, is it fantastic. Matt Wagner (of Grendel fame) takes up the tale of Wesley Dodds, a wealthy businessman who starts to have horrible nightmares of crimes and finds that the only way to make them go away is to don a trenchcoat and gas mask and go out to fight crime. Much like the original comic book, this is pure pulp fiction. But it's wonderful. Where dark but trite plots plagued the former, this incarnation is full of meaty plots, wonderful characterization, and sharp dialogue. And Guy Davis' artwork is almost anti-comic book in its detailed realism, historically accurate body sizes, and noir cinema-quality framing. Together they make a formidable pair as much as Wesley and his paramour Diane are. And, oh yeah, Diane is a female character who is at once his equal. Not just a romantic interest but a fully-thinking functioning character? That's crazy.

Enter the world of the Golden Age Sandman. This is the crime novel you've always wanted to read.

Devowasright says

i had some of these issues once upon a time... such great stories.. a great concept, and reinvention of the golden age sandman..

Randolph says

Wesley Dodds is my favorite kind of comics super-hero: he isn't. Zero superpowers, not even the "power to cloud mens' minds" like The Shadow. All he has is a trench-coat, a fedora, a gas gun, and a WWI gas mask. Which means, when he goes to work, just like Super Man or the Green Lantern, he's about as inconspicuous as a cockroach on a wedding cake, only unlike them, no powers, like I said.

Don't expect to find Morpheus here except when Mr. Dodds uses his not-so magic gun on you. And death isn't some cute chick either. Its a brutal kick in the throat. Wesley Dodds's Sandman is a resurrection of the

real DC Sandman from the 1940s. He likes to leave bits of poetry on pieces of origami. I like that.

The artwork is updated old school comic style. The story is pretty much straight 1940s noir which isn't effective all the time, but pretty fun nonetheless. Like all good noir (as opposed to mystery) nobody really cares about the plot but instead the characters, the setting, the ambiance of quiet anxiety and despair, are what matters. There is a lot of incest, bondage, torture, and murder for those who like that sort of thing, so don't leave it around for the kiddies to read.

Ian says

Like noir, wanna see a gritty late 30s crime drama with a slight dose superheroing and surrealism? Like period NYC? Then this series might be for you. Add a gas mask, some pull no punches grittiness and themes of social consciousness and thats what you've got here. Art is a bit overly sketchy for my taste but it does work with the style and tone. Those in the mood for noir should consider it.

Joseph says

Sparkling dialog and a careful study of human nature mark the first volume of The Sandman Mystery Theatre, starring the WW2 Sandman, Wesley Dodds. Matt Wagner creates a world full of amorality, and it's the Sandman's duty to correct injustices in order to soothe his tortured soul.

The antagonists in this story are not hard to figure out, but the way Wagner brings us to the conclusion is sharp and mesmerizing. This is a thoroughly enjoyable story, as sickening as much of it is. Film noir as Comics noir.

Artist Guy Davis has a scratchy, "underground comix" style of illustration. The characters are not attractive, and the perspective is often a bit skewed, but it fits the mood of the book very well.

Jeff says

The original Sandman was a Golden Age superhero and a founding member of the Justice Society of America.

He ran around in a trench coat and gas mask, using knock out gas to subdue evil doers and get them to reveal their dark secrets.

I'm assuming the publishers back then thought this was just a tad bit creepy, so they put him in yellow and

purple spandex and gave him a teen-aged boy side kick named, Sandy, the Golden Boy...

The creepiness was now only sub-textual. Heh.

During the heyday of DC's Vertigo line of comics, Matt Wagner revived the title, adding a nice noir-ish, pulpy edge. It seems that Wesley Dodds has spent some time in the orient ~~hanging out in brothels getting baked in opium dens~~ learning the in's and out's of making different kinds of gas and honing his overarching sense of justice.

Dodds is also plagued by haunting, yet lyrically poetic, dreams that don't include walking around nude at the local grocery store.

I'm guessing, but this is probably a side-effect from the opiates.

Anyway, there's a kidnapping/murder/mobster/torture/corruption/money laundering/incest/jaywalking thing happening in New York City, so Dodds can finally put all his new-found skills to good use.

Plus, he leaves origami animals whenever he pays a visit. Neat-o!

I'm of two minds on the artwork of Guy Davis. One, he does a great job capturing the times and atmosphere; yet, he's less than effective in differentiating some of the characters. Was that the detective's superior or the assistant district attorney or a random, well-dressed hobo?

Bottom line: This one's a re-read from sometime back. I came across the first four volumes of the series in a bargain bin (so expect more reviews, kids). Wagner does a fine job building up the tension and stringing the reader along in what's sometimes a byzantine plot with one too many characters. There's enough gray area here for all concerned (including the Sandman) to keep this from drifting into the bland. Dian Belmont, who would later become a partner of sorts, plays less the damsel in distress and more a self-assured resourceful woman who doesn't let the times trap her ambitions and intelligence.

Gavin says

Film Noir in comic book form. This feels like it came right out of the late 1930s. The Wesley Dodds Sandman is a character I've been interested in reading more of for some time, and luckily I got my hands on this. This is a great start for a series, taking a character from the past, and letting modern readers get a chance to enjoy him. Luckily Matt Wagner is able to write pulp noir very well, and with all that atmosphere and

great backdrop, tell us a story of murder, incest, blackmail and more!

I heartily recommend this to anyone who likes Noir or the Sandman of the 1930s-40s. It's just a good book altogether.

Ryan says

Interesting, well-fleshed out characters in a story that was a bit too dry for my taste. I picked this up because it has some early Guy Davis art. Not too big a fan of the color palette, all of the characters look like either like albinos or dead.

Paul says

Originally bought as single-issues, I have the complete collection.

Somehow, Matt Wagner and Guy Davis were the perfect team to bring the original Sandman back. Where most writers would have updated the character to bring him into the 21st century, Matt Wagner goes way back to his original roots set in the 1940s and gives us a bare bones version of the character. This isn't a super-hero, he doesn't jump from rooftops, he's fallible, he's a well-rounded, caring human being, heck he's not even muscle-bound, he could probably even lose a bit of weight. You actually get the impression that he has to make an effort to do the things he does. Add to that the more than believable love interest of Dian and you have the setting for some great stories.

These stories should be re-collected into Absolute or Deluxe editions... even if I might be the only one buying them :-)

Nate says

I don't know if I could call this series underrated as the people who do read it tend to thoroughly like or love it but I could probably get away with calling it underexposed. Honestly, if you have an interest in crime, period pieces, noir, or masked vigilantes you could probably get into this--even if you're not a reader of comics/graphic novels. The writing is full of style, moodiness, and original uses of imagery in a very literary way and the art just has this jarring crudeness to it that gives everything an ugly and surreal quality. It's obvious literary tradition is important to Wagner as even this first arc mentions several well-known authors of the time period in a very favorable way.

Wesley Dodds returns to New York City in the late 1930s after a long absence to take over his father's business in the wake of his death. This is a great career move for Wesley 'cause he's actually the Sandman; a brilliant gas-mask-wearing vigilante wielding a non-lethal gas gun. Each arc of five or six issues deals with the Sandman solving bizarre and intensely violent crimes while trying to deal with his other life as Dodds and his relationship with his awesome girlfriend Dian. I really liked Dian; it's obvious Wagner put a lot of thought and care into writing a strong, smart and driven woman living in a pretty chauvinistic man's world. It's easy to start liking Wesley right away, as well; he's kind, insightful, flawed, and the sequences portraying his dreams make him one of my favorite protagonists. The weird darkness in his head that compels him to act as the Sandman just makes him that more compelling.

While I'm on the topic of weird darkness, this first case is a bizarre and deeply disturbing one. As I hate potentially spoiling stuff for people I hesitate to include details but it focuses on a series of kidnappings that only gets more and more gross and unsettling as the Sandman forces his way to the center of it all. Honestly, this is a scary comic. I consider myself pretty jaded when it comes to this kind of thing and this story was an unnerving experience. It's funny that some people consider the comic/graphic novel medium an immature one, as this series puts that wonderfully bad taste in my mouth in a way that a lot of novels I've read haven't.

I really could bounce between four and five stars on any given day. The blend of horror, mystery, masked vigilantism and period piece is executed perfectly by the writer and artist. I'm sure I'll finish the series and this makes me very excited to check out Wagner's other stuff like *Grendel*, which I'm pretty sure is the series he's most famous for doing. It's a cliché to say stuff like "This is a comic for people who don't read comics" but this is a great example of that; people who are already fans of the medium will probably enjoy this but it also seems like it could rope in some newcomers--as long as they have a strong stomach.

mark monday says

Matt Wagner updates Golden Age Sandman with a conspicuously modern focus on torture and atrocity while keeping the setting enjoyably retro. the time is the 1930s and the milieu is a post-Depression world of high society, gangsters, and a lack of costumed heroes. Enter the Sandman. He has a great, sinister look (trench coat, three-piece suit, and gas mask), a bunch of disturbing dreams, and no powers outside of his pluck and a supply of sleeping gas. he's a wonderfully idiosyncratic hero. the story itself is very noir and surprisingly perverse.

Guy Davis provides the art and it is perfectly fitting for the story, all spidery lines and fuzzy backdrops. unfortunately, he's terrible with faces and that ends up being a real minus.

Wagner is an accomplished and experienced writer and his strengths (and weaknesses) are on display in The Tarantula. I appreciated the focus on women, although he does play that annoying game of pointing out that women are usually victims - while still having women be the victims of his story. put up or shut up, Wagner. and there's always been an off-putting tendency in his work to really embrace the dark side to an almost exploitative, torture-porn degree, and that's certainly present in this story (a lot of torture plus molestation, incest, etc). so much that I found it to be over the top and unnecessary and it almost ruined the story for me. fortunately, the story itself is compelling enough, the hero is great, the art is interesting, and for the most part Wagner is a fine writer... so overall, a good read.

'kris Pung says

A great noir book where surprisingly the killers identity is revealed pretty early on but it was still enjoyable watching the good guys put all the pieces together.

Brad Abraham says

[This review is more for the entire Sandman Mystery Theatre series than simply Vol. 1. As a freshly minted stay-at-home dad as well as a working writer, my free time available to review books, let alone read them, is somewhat compromised at the moment.]

First, some background;

Way back in the 1990s I was a college student. I was also a comic book fan. I also didn't have a lot of money to spend on comics so I had to be careful where I spent my cash. I really only read Hellblazer and Preacher regularly. So I struck a deal with my roommate, also a comic book fan that I would buy certain titles and he'd buy the others. One of his titles was this one, Sandman Mystery Theatre.

Flash-forward to 2015. I'm a writer of movies, TV, novels, and, yes, comic books. And I've been re-reading a lot of old comics and TPBs. One is Neil Gaiman's Midnight Days, comprising a selection of his stand-alone comics work - Swamp Thing, Hellblazer ... and the Sandman Mystery Theatre annual. That twigged my re-interest in SMT -- I'd only read the stories once, when my roommate was done with his copy. I never re-read them, but I recall being quite fond of them, being an old-school pulp and serial radio show fan.

So I hit up my LCS, brows the stacks, and find SMT Vol. 1 (signed by Matt Wagner no less). Ten clams later it's mine.

So ... how does Sandman Mystery Theatre stand up?

Pretty well as it happens. Set in the Golden Age DC universe of 1938, as well as Neil Gaiman's Sandman-verse, SMT chronicles the adventures of Wesley Dodds, playboy millionaire - slash detective and his paramour Dian Belmont as they plumb the seedy side of Depression era NYC; a warts-and-all depiction of a sexist, racist era that doesn't shy away from brutal violence and grave injustice. Sort of a "Nick and Nora Charles" meets "Se7en" if that makes sense.

Actually that sounds kind of awesome. But I digress.

This next bit probably counts as a "trigger warning" -- this is one dark, nasty bit of business and definitely not for the squeamish. Murder, rape, incest, racism, bigotry, homophobia -- all things that would get this book banned from "safe spaces" on college campuses today was part of the fabric in the 1930s. That's part of its appeal; this is a dark and edgy book that hasn't lost those visceral pulpy thrills twenty years on, and captures the flavor of the pulp era that's been sanitized by Hayes Office era censorship.

Part of the thrill of re-discovering 1990s Vertigo comics is in discovering how raw and edgy they were, especially coming from a major comics publisher. Each story is comprised of 4 acts, so each book allows you to jump in without so much as a "for those of you just joining us". The overall story is connected however - the growing relationship between Wesley and Dian is the backbone of the Sandman saga, and is actually one of the more realistic relationships portrayed in comics of any era. They meet cute, they fall in love, they fight, they endure a bitter separation and desperate reconciliation, and things get more difficult from there in a storyline late in the series run dealing with abortion.

*If there's one criticism I have - aside from some issues where the art isn't quite up to par with Guy Davis' masterful work - is how DC has essentially abandoned Sandman Mystery Theatre to the dustbin of history. There's 8 volumes collected, carrying us up to roughly 52 issues of a 70-issue run. That last volume was published by DC in 2010, with no sign when, if ever, they're going to collect the remaining books. Fortunately my LCS (plural - I live in NYC and there's a lot of comic book stores) helped me snag the final 18 issues in single issue format.

So, if you do start reading SMT, be prepared for the story to be left unresolved, until DC collects the remaining issues, or you're able to grab them used, or through ComiXology.*

So, with the above caveats, Sandman Mystery Theatre comes highly recommended, both as a series that while never one of DCs or Vertigo's big sellers, used that status to push the envelope of comics storytelling, and remains a standard bearer for a time when a mainstream publisher like DC would still take risks on its

less well-known characters.

RorSpike says

????? batman ???

Shannon Lewis says

really on point revisit of a classic character in a story possibly better than any previously attached to the character. Just a gem.

Jayaprakash Satyamurthy says

I'd read a few stray issues of Sandman Mystery Theatre, but this is the first time I've read any of the collected editions. I liked the story with some qualifications: I'm uneasy with the prevalence of depictions of sexualised violence against women in popular fiction, and the first story arc of SMT contains a great deal of this sort of thing. It's clear who the bad guys are, but still, I am not sure it is handled as well as it could be. The other problem is that, at the end of this story arc, the character of Wesley Dodds, the Sandman, is still a bit of a cypher. The police were always one step behind him and aside from one essential clue it isn't clear that this mystery could not have been solved without his interference. Dian, who is destined to be his partner, is very well characterised and this makes up for the annoyingly nebulous nature of Dodds. Hopefully future volumes will bring him more into focus. Finally, I really liked the art. It's atmospheric and has personality.

Andy Zeigert says

Neil Gaiman's SANDMAN was perfect in almost every way.

So why did Vertigo revive the character again? Just to hit closer to the original mark? Who knows. Most likely it was to try to ride the wave. Maybe even trick a few people into thinking they were getting more of Gaiman's SANDMAN.

In any case, SANDMAN MYSTERY THEATRE didn't have much going for it. Except that it turned out to be kind of brilliant. Matt Wagner's noir sensibilities shine, and the hand lettering of the book reminds me how boring today's ubiquitous digital lettering can be.

Mostly I picked up this title to see early art from Guy Davis, and I wasn't disappointed. His organic style was great then, even if it has grown into something greater since.

This first volume does struggle from a clunky narrative, and more action would probably have brought it up a notch. Still, I'll likely pick up another volume, although Davis doesn't return on art until Vol. 3. I'm just a sucker for pulp noir.

Michael Anderson says

First story arc of new tales of the Golden Age comic book character, Sandman. This is not Gaiman's Endless Sandman, but a human crime fighter who works in shadow with a truth/knockout gas gun and a World War I gas mask. I bought the first issue of this from the newsstand and, after reading it through back in the day, decided not to continue the series. Now that I've read the entire four-issue story, I still don't find it compelling enough to read other stories in the series. The plot is pedestrian, and the art is moody but barely adequate to differentiate minor characters from one another. Don't get me wrong. If someone put more Sandman story collections in front of me, I would read them and enjoy them. I just wouldn't go out of my way for them.

Frank Hoppe says

I enjoyed the noir-ish feel to it and a female protagonist who was smart, assertive, and not too attractive in the all-too-usual sense. There were some sketchy places where I didn't fully fathom what was being depicted, but the book was a fun ride.
