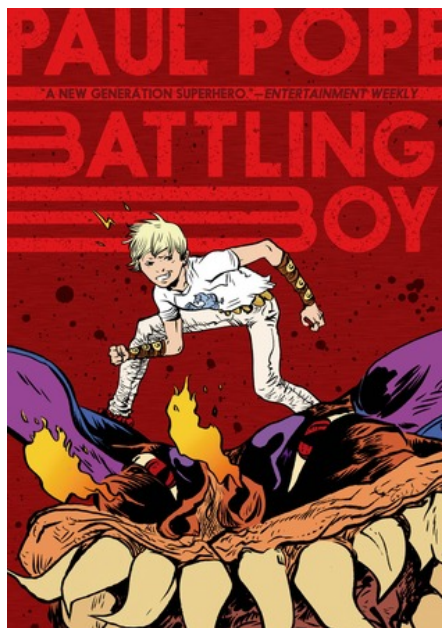




Battling Boy

Paul Pope

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The adventure begins.

Monsters roam through Acropolis, swallowing children into the horrors of their shadowy underworld. Only one man is a match for them--the genius vigilante Haggard West.

Unfortunately Haggard West is dead.

Acropolis is desperate, but when its salvation comes in the form of a twelve-year-old demigod, nobody is more surprised than Battling Boy himself.

Battling Boy Details

Date : Published October 8th 2013 by First Second

ISBN : 9781596431454

Author : Paul Pope

Format : Paperback 202 pages

Genre : Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, Comics, Fantasy, Young Adult, Adventure, Fiction, Science Fiction

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From Reader Review Battling Boy for online ebook

Nicola Mansfield says

I don't have much to say about this one. Having noticed the other high star ratings this book has received I realize I am in the minority in my opinion but I just didn't like it. I really wanted to though!. It sounded so like my type of book but it just didn't do anything for me. Even though it was full of monster-battling action from beginning to end I found myself bored and wanting the book to hurry up and be over. The Hero's son being sent to battle monsters to prove his coming-of-age and hero-worthiness felt cliched and I found the font got awfully small at times. Sorry, but I got nothing from this one. The book ends abruptly too, obviously making this part one of a possibly long series which should have been labeled Vol. 1 to let us know.

Sam Quixote says

I feel like Battling Boy should his own 80s kids cartoon theme music.

Battling Boy! Battling Boy!
Fighting monsters 'stead of playin' with toys!
Battling Booooooooooy!

He's a space prince come to save the world
There a Batman character who's also a girl
The boy's got a cape that's big and red
He's basically young Superman - yeah!

Battling Boy! Battling Boy!
Nothing rhymes with Battling Boy!

(To the tune of something awesome and '80s rockin' with a montage of Battling Boy punching bad guys and then looking sheepish in the final shot)

Paul Pope's Battling Boy sorta reminded me of 80s kids cartoons but the similarities in this book go beyond those shows and mines references across the cultural spectrum from the 1960s Batman show to the Golden and Silver Ages of comics. You have Battling Boy who lives in the Hidden Gilded realm (basically Asgard) and whose dad is unnamed but is pretty much Thor. As part of his coming-of-age ritual (he's a pre-teen) he has to undertake a "rambling" which is where he's taken from his home to another world on his "turning day" and made to overcome obstacles to prove he's a man (kind of like Hercules' Labours). Thor takes Battling Boy to a city called Arcopolis that's under siege from crazy monsters and he's left with a suitcase of interesting magical objects and a red cape that makes him look like a young Superman.

There's also a Batman-ish figure in Arcopolis called Haggard West (a tribute to Adam West?), a cross between Batman and the Rocketeer and whose car is called the Westmobile(!). The main villain of the book is Sadisto, kind of like the Joker but looks like the Grinch wearing a ninja outfit with a hint of Mumm-Ra. But despite the numerous references to more familiar cultural figures, Paul Pope manages to make Battling Boy feel fresh and his own thing.

Pope captures what being a boy who discovers he has superpowers really well. First off BB really seems like a boy – his personality is at times overconfident which leads to mistakes, innocent, which leads to situations

he doesn't want to be in, and he can become scared and run back to his dad for protection (like he does when he faces his first monster). Being young, he's not as articulate as he would like to be and his natural politeness makes it hard for him to communicate how he truly feels – in one brilliant scene when Arcopolis' mayor is trying to use BB as a political tool, BB becomes frustrated and wordlessly scrunches up a metal paperweight with his bare hands before remaking it anew. It puts across his unique strength and otherworldliness while also letting them know he will not be their puppet all at once.

One of the most inspired choices Pope makes is giving BB a dozen t-shirts with animal totems on them, with each shirt bestowing BB with that animal's attribute, eg. King Lion or Curious Orangutan or the Sly Silent Fox. It's similar to Bravestarr's powers ("Strength of the Bear! Speed of the Puma!" – there are those 80s kids cartoon references again!) but work really well here as we see BB figure out how to use these powers, failing to control them at first but slowly learning to.

The book is fleshed out further with the excellent character, Aurora West, the daughter of Haggard West, the Batman/Rocketeer figure of Arcopolis. Haggard dies early in the book and, as a subplot to BB's main arc, Aurora, though only slightly older than BB, begins training to become the new hero of Arcopolis. So this book contains the origin stories of two heroes in one, both of whom are loosely analogues of arguably the two most famous superheroes in history. It's fantastically realised and fun to see, especially if you're a superhero comics fan like me.

In terms of the audience for this book, Sadisto is kind of a disturbingly drawn figure and his unsettlingly vague mission of abducting children for an unknown purpose (it's implied they are abused) might make this not the most appropriate read for younger readers, but I think it's alright for young teens to pick up and it's definitely sophisticated enough for adults to get a lot out of it too.

I just wrote a lengthy list of things I loved about this book and, though they're harmless observations that won't spoil the book for you, I deleted it anyway because I want the little touches Pope throws into the mix to be as much a pleasant surprise to me as they will be to you.

Combine the many small but brilliant touches into the 12 Labours of Hercules-esque storyline, the characters of Battling Boy, Aurora West, and Sadisto, and Pope's AMAZING art, and you have one helluva book. As much as I've written about this book, there are lots of other things I haven't mentioned – Battling Boy contains multitudes. If you love superhero comics, you'll really get a lot out of this but even if you're not well-versed in superhero stories, it's still a really fun story that anyone can enjoy. For me, I think it's the best work Pope's done yet, and is one of the most enjoyable and original superhero stories I've read in ages. I had a blast and look forward to Vol 2 as BB and Aurora West team up to take down Sadisto and the remaining monsters of Arcopolis.

Battling Booooooooooy!

Jan Philipzig says

Battling Boy is the son of a mighty God. He spent his childhood among his own kind in the so-called Starry Lofts - sounds pleasant, doesn't it? On the eve of his adolescence, however, he is sent all the way down to good old Planet Earth... or something like it, at least: to a city called Arcopolis.

Arcopolis is a place overrun with terrible monsters that, for reasons unknown, specialize in kidnapping the city's children. The children's sole protector has just been slain, and now Battling Boy is supposed to step up to the plate, that is, prove himself by becoming the city's new hero. Not an easy task, not even for the son of

a god.

The premise may not be terribly original, but creator Paul Pope brings it to life with imaginative detail and his trademark loose, raw, dynamic, kinetic artwork. Reminiscent of some of Alan Moore's ABC work, *Battling Boy* feels like the pulpier, raunchier, more subversive version of a traditional superhero origin story - targeted at a slightly older audience.

Emma Deneault says

Battling Boy, a bright and action-packed comic by Paul Pope, unveils a post-apocalyptic experience for a young boy forced into the role of a hero. The reader is immediately dropped into a strangely familiar scene of the distressed city of Arcopolis, dressed in monsters and fairy-tale antagonists alike. The city's previously reliant hero is sadly exterminated in battle, subsequently initiating a terrifying sense of vulnerability. Young *Battling Boy* is just as surprised to become the city's new hero as its citizens are. We follow *Battling Boy* through a journey of his newfound independence and self discovery.

This book uses enticing imagery to grab a reader's attention, but it quickly becomes evident that the text relies entirely on its images. Pope fails to make a strong connection between the story and its visual counterpart, which leaves room for confusion and misunderstanding for the reader. If the reader were provided with no imagery at all the story itself would not exist, but perhaps that is the point.

This reading has a striking appeal to pre-teen boys everywhere, if not just for their shared demographic with *Battling Boy* himself. His sense of confusion and obvious insecurity can be relatable for all readers, even if his journey is hard to understand at times. These same young readers, however, will likely face the most perplexity in understanding the book's sequence of events and ultimate ties between sections and characters. The book is divided into very obviously separate sections, that can initially be mistaken as entirely different stories from one another. The lack of descriptive text and appropriate language leaves the reader scratching their head from time to time. For a young teen engorged in this reading, they may find the vocabulary regressive or just simply not challenging.

The theme of finding strength in fear has potential to make this story great, so long as its text and pictures are aligned. The illustrations are very obviously the best part of the story, and visually guide the reader page by page. Pope's varied use of color, tone, and hue catch the reader's eye and enhance the overall experience of the story. It is easy to see the appeal to this science-fiction adventure tale, but it fell short in its lack of effective text. Personally, I would not use this as a classroom novel, but for those who disagree, they would likely use it to emphasize the importance of courage, integrity, and honesty.

Raina says

Awesome monsters, epic settings, and a magical suitcase of t-shirts. Srsly. This is so much fun. Pope should do more comics that work for the middle school set, bc I can totally see him riding the wave of Doug TenNapel and Pinocchio Vampire Slayer into the hearts of middle schoolers everywhere.

This thing is beautifully colored and though the illustrations are a touch cramped at first glance, when you actually focus on each panel in turn (as you're supposed to), everything makes sense and sucks you along the

story. I LOVE the bar where the monsters gather, and I'm eager to see where Battling Boy's story goes next. It's pulpy and fun and will be read to death when presented to the right people.

Kevin Wright says

For the record, I'm a huge Paul Pope fan. I think he's one of the few real visionaries working in comics today, one of only a handful of artists who are really challenging the pre-conceived notions of the craft of comic book storytelling. He can crank out pages when he has to, but only after he's thought about what he's going to draw for a long time. He doesn't do things by rote. He seizes the opportunity to say something new in everything he does. Ultimately, he has the potential to be a watershed artist in the history of the medium, alongside great innovators like Kirby, Steranko, and Moebius. He's one of the leaders and best practitioners of what he calls "world comics," a global style which blends the best of American, Japanese, and European comics. Most importantly, he also draws inspiration from outside of comics—art, music, fashion, experimental film, performance art—to expand both his realm of reference and his sphere of influence. Battling Boy, his long-awaited YA graphic novel, is some of the best work he's ever done. It's fun, imaginative, humorous, and action-packed. It's a culmination of almost 20 years of experimentation in the realm of visual storytelling. But it's not without problems.

First of all, the format surprised me. Unlike the large, slim graphic novels One-Trick Rip-Off and Escapo, Battling Boy's 6"x8" size is much closer to a manga volume than a traditional American graphic novel size. Obviously, that's designed to be part of the YA appeal. No kid's going to read a 200-page tome that he or she can't even lift. It makes the book more of a fun read that you can take with you, but it's also a disservice to Pope's intricate artwork. The tiny lettering also makes me think it was conceived as a larger book originally.

For the most part, I agree with Tim Callahan's enthusiastic assessment over on Comic Book Resources (<http://www.comicbookresources.com/?pa...>). On the one hand, there is depth and nuance and humor to it. My main issue with this book is it feels too contrived, which is not something I could ever say about Pope's work before. But BB feels like a calculated attempt to court a YA audience and make a book with built-in movie rights (the book was optioned back in 2008 and Pope has been collaborating with the screenwriter since at least 2009). The story structure is very Joseph Campbell by-the-numbers. The character of Aurora West gets some nice character moments, but Battling Boy himself seems a little underdeveloped. And the pacing, with extended fight sequences borrowed from manga, feels off in terms of both story and character development, with some narrative threads dropped for way too many pages. Pope has successfully tried this technique before in THB, but it worked in THB because that series had an organic and spontaneous flow. BB, on the other hand, feels like a commercial enterprise from start to finish. Not that I begrudge Pope his chance to cash in, but this is the first Pope book that feels like a cash-grab. On the other hand, it's really an opportunity to expose a new group of young readers to Pope's unique and inspiring imagination. I'd certainly love for more mainstream comics to take a page from Pope's playbook.

Ultimately, however, I think this book succeeds on style. Despite films like Scott Pilgrim and Pacific Rim and shows like Ben 10 and Adventure Time, which all share a certain sensibility with Battling Boy's 12-year-old monster fighter, I have a hard time imagining Battling Boy: The Motion Picture as having one-tenth of the energy, verve, or style of Paul Pope's original art and vision.

Emilia P says

Why do superheroes wear such silly hats? I mean, seriously, Thor-esque-God-dude, you lost me at the Rambling. I will say two things. I was singularly unimpressed by the superheroes in this story and I thought the storytelling was clunky and uneven and I gave not one hoot for the titular Battling Boy. I gave slightly more of a hoot for of-this-world daughter of the fallen human superhero guy, but, eh. I have no desire to root for them or reflect upon the tropes and responsibilities of superheroes in our fallen world.

But the monsters and the bad guys were super-sweet (woo mummyish Sadisto!), wildly drawn and wonderfully colored, the bad-guy bar was especially awesome (giant silkworm dudes!), the unmasking of Sadisto was pretty nicely gross, and the silhouetted-demon-guy-upon-his-throne at the end was fantastic. I could just read books about bad guys, or just books with pictures of bad guys, story not included, all day long. And this book would be pretty cool if it was just that.

All told, I'm no superhero connoisseur so I can't say if this was much good -- but I can say I resent it being just the buildup to a Stunning Sequel! Build-ups should be satisfying in themselves too, and story-wise this wasn't.

Anyways... Point being: The illustrations were pretty good here, but the story was a wash for me, and I probably won't go in for the next one. My apologies First Second (ARC via NetGalley), but my statement on the positiveness of your diversity of offerings this year stands. Hooray.

Rick says

Ok, I'm biased. I'm a fan. But good-golly-miss-molly this 200-page graphic novel reads like a 22-page Kirby slugfest. I hate to say that Pope is at the top of his game because he just seems to keep getting better and better, but *Battling Boy* is a definately a treat. This frighteningly fun read is chock-full of fascinating characters, exciting action and exciting new worlds to explore. Sure Pope builds on architypes of the superhero genre with *Haggard West* is a very Phantom/Shadow/Spider/Batman type of figure and *Battling Boy's* dad is very much in the Thor/Orion vein. The material in the earlier published *The Death of Haggard West* is also included and incorporated into the main text.

Pope's dynamic, frenzied art is perfect for this type of tale and the story is a clear descendant of Kirby's work on *Thor*, *The Eternals Omnibus* and the "*Fourth World*" titles from DC. This fun, light-hearted and fast-paced graphic novel should be included on every Kirby fan's shelf as well as fan of *Thor*, *The Eternals*, the *Forever People* or the *New Gods*.

To put it simply: Paul Pope's *Battling Boy* ROCKS! I give this one my highest *Rickommendations*.

UPDATE: I just read this a second time and even with several years having passed since I first read this, it still holds up. A fun and excellent read. Still waiting for a sequel...

Juju says

The wait is finally over and Paul Pope once again delivers the goods. It's obvious that Paul dug deep into himself for this one. The art is breathtaking, both kinetic and expressive. There is a consistent inventiveness

that just pops off the page, transforming old ideas (like Haggard West and Humbaba) into something fresh and new. And the story, as the first chapter in an expanding series, pulls you through at a lightning pace, introducing dozens of characters and several worlds that would be great to spend more time with. There are several surprises throughout, and I really appreciate the story's hopeful tone, as well as the diversity that feels organic in this book. I like to imagine giving this as a gift to my past 10-year old self, because kids are going to love this series along with the growing numbers of grown up Pope fans. I was surprised that the book itself was kinda small, especially since Pope's artwork is best viewed larger, but he has mentioned the possibility of a deluxe, oversized black and white edition in the works. And best of all, this means THB is ever closer, and judging from the quality of the work here it will be magnificent. Highly recommended.

Relstuart says

I really enjoyed this. Great set up where you have the cosmic gods in their home with a ritual where their children are sent out to a world with a duty or project and they must accomplish whatever it is out there to become adults they are intended to be.

A Thor look a like drops his son off in a 1940s looking world with a huge city that is slowly losing a war against monsters. Our hero, the Battling Boy must defeat the monsters. Sadly, the book sets everything up very well and gets Battling Boy's story started as he is trying to figure out what he can do when it ends.

It appears there is a pre-equal that centers around the cities science/adventure defender and his daughter but I'm not sure the rest of the story is out yet.

Jessica at Book Sake says

Book Review by Chris for Book Sake

Battling Boy is just so stylish, you don't have any choice but to fall in love with the book. The story, the art, the dialogue all harken back to the 80's sci-fi epics of old. It's so grand, but in such a grounded way. I have flashes of Flash Gordon, Buckaroo Banzai, and maybe touches of The Last Starfighter.

Battling Boy is basically the daydreams of my youth coming alive on page. Maybe my adult daydreams as well. A super powered kid battling giant monsters? I spent many an afternoon living in that world. He even has a cool cape, though he gets rid of it for some reason. I don't care how useless they are, they look awesome.

That's not to say Battling Boy is perfect. It's short on story. I don't know if that's because this is just the tip of the iceberg or because it's as simple as a kid fighting monsters.

The book is over 200 pages and Battling Boy doesn't show up till about half-way through. The only character with any back-story or character growth is the now orphaned daughter of Acropolis' now dead savior.

I am looking forward to seeing where the story goes and how it builds up. Even if it doesn't really progress too much, I know it will still be fun because whenever I see Battling Boy I will be seeing myself punching that wicked monster and saving the day.

Book Review by Jessica for Book Sake

At Chris's suggestion, I gave this graphic novel a try. While I didn't like it as much as he did, I can see the draw. I'm more into books for stories and character development – he's into the art more than I am. The story was interesting and I think that the follow up book will get a move on things faster than this introduction. It seemed to me that it took a really long time to introduce "Battling Boy" into the world. I wasn't fond of the way Battling Boy's family spoke, it was harder to read and he didn't talk like that so I'm not sure the reasoning there. There is another character, that I assume will share the pages with Battling Boy, and a bit of the story was devoted to her father and she was included in that area as well – but wasn't the extreme focus of much of that. I will pick up the next book to see where it goes and hope that there will be more development of the main character.

Book Received: For free from publisher in exchange for an honest review

Candice M (tinylibrarian) says

Can monster-plagued Arcopolis be saved by a twelve-year-old demigod? Compelling and action-packed from the get-go, readers follow the intersecting paths of Aurora West, teenage daughter of slain hero Haggard West, and tween demigod Battling Boy, both on quests to prove themselves and save Arcopolis from the monsters plaguing it. In trying to find their way as young heroes, Aurora and Battling Boy discover that lack of self-confidence may be the most dangerous monster of all.

Olivia says

I finally found this in the library after having it on my to-read list for so long. It's interesting that it's considered a kids book (or at least a PZ 7 in LC). There are several panels of action that I guess is kinda violent but I had no idea what was actually happening. Maybe that's fairly realistic if you think about it.

ANYWAY. This is the only thing I've read by Paul Pope, so I'm struck by his style. Everyone is, well, ugly. Everyone looks like they've got some miles on them, as my Mom would say. Except the women have huge collagen-filled lips, which might be considered attractive by some. The roughness of everyone actually makes me not look at the people that much and focus more on other details.

The panels help create a cool narrative flow, sometimes overlapping or being used as a background. The colors are also great.

He handles the story well. It's fairly simple and at the end there are a lot of unanswered questions. He doesn't try to explain everything, which is always refreshing. Not sure if he started this off planning on writing more, but it makes sense that he did. The world he created is intriguing and I would consider reading the others.

Trey Piepmeier says

This was a really fun read. I think I need to read up on Greek Mythology to get more out of this story.

I was already a big fan of Paul Pope, and this book just reinforces that. It would be so easy for this story to

be gratuitously violent, sexual, or use foul language, but it doesn't, and that really makes it stand out. There's no reason kids couldn't read this book.

The art (especially the bright colors) and the juxtaposition of seemingly normal everyday things with monsters and gods is delightful. I'm looking forward to the next volume.

Random aside: how bad is it of me to buy a \$3 drink at B&N and then sit and read this in its entirety without actually buying it? Bad?

Jeff Jackson says

Some of Paul Pope's best work. Nominally aimed at a YA audience, but it remains graphically sophisticated and never dumbs down the narrative. Interested to see how the story unfolds in the upcoming volumes.
