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Sundiata



Synopsis

In this tale from the land of Mali, the ruler Sumanguru cannot satisfy his ambition enough. When he encounters the Gray Rock of Evil, his powers are multiplied manifold. Now able to manipulate the elements, he goes on a rampage of conquests. However, the rock is devious and prepares an enemy for him, one he knows Sumanguru will pay no heed to: a crippled child.

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Customer Reviews

This series is one of a few literary adaptations Eisner's penned in recent years, and this story seems the least suited to the artist's urban style. The Sundiata legend is a hero/nation-building myth, an adaptation of the African legend of Sundiata, in which a Malian child-prince, born crippled, liberates his people from Sumanguru, the evil King of the rival Sosso people. Eisner's version of the tale begins with an explanation of the Great Grey Rock, a magical stone which gives Sumanguru mighty evil powers. Sumanguru discards the stone after tapping its powers, an act he will regret. Eventually Sumanguru comes to the land of Mali and defeats Sundiata's father. When Sundiata finally confronts Sumanguru, he is saved from defeat by the deviously magical Rock, which removes Sumanguru's evil powers at a crucial moment. Sundiata then rules gently over his newly free and prosperous Mali. While these events unfold clearly enough, there is nary an ounce of drama in the book. Eisner's artwork, once supple and expressive, has deteriorated into a scratchy, by-the-numbers affair. On firm territory when he creates urban stories, in this work he seems lost in the wilderness. Eisner is one of the great masters of comics storytelling, but his recent works continue to suffer from stereotype and melodrama. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Grade 3-5-Though the figures in this freely retold comic-book version of the legend are charged with melodrama, veteran graphic novelist Eisner has inexplicably chosen to color them in drab ochre and gray. Narrated by the Rock of Evil, a head-shaped boulder with faint African features, the tale actually centers around the rise and fall of Sumanguru, a leering, brutal magician-king who conquers the peaceful land of Mali, but then makes the mistake of letting the last survivor of its royal family, the lame child Sundiata, live. Sundiata grows from naked (sexless) boy to strong manhood in two pages, learns the art of war and gathers an army in two more, then marches on Sumanguru for a climactic seven-page battle that ends when the tyrant vanishes into a cave. Sundiata goes on to become a beloved, long-lived king. Confusingly, the lithic narrator seems to have a change of heart, and closes its tale with a benevolent smile. Though Eisner depicts strong emotions and larger-than-life characters masterfully, this sketchy account of the great Malinke ruler is unlikely to make as lasting an impression on readers as David Wisniewski's *Sundiata: Lion King of Mali* (Clarion, 1999). John Peters, New York Public Library Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Will Eisner's telling of Sundiata is not so hot as a stand-alone, although it might be nice in an anthology. The story has been retold by many authors, although I'm not aware of any other comic book versions. As a small child, Sundiata is unable to walk. Meanwhile, in the nearby desert, the evil warrior Sumanguru meets a magical stone which promises power to Sumanguru. Sumanguru begins his conquests and comes to conquer Sundiata's land...The illustrations are a bit flat/bland. It looks like Will Eisner's other later work from the 80s and 90s. There is not much color - everything is in earth tones. Frames bleed into one another or are boxed off when appropriate. The layouts work but at the same time there isn't anything about this book that makes it stand out visually. Overall, nothing made this book or telling of the story stand out to me. The entire book is only 32 pages long, and all 32 pages are forgettable. There are short stunning picture books, and short stunning comic books, and short stunning stories, but Will Eisner's *Sundiata* is not one of them. The problem is that there just isn't enough there. *Sundiata* would be great as part of an anthology of Eisner's work, but doesn't seem worth a separate book. This is worth reading if someone hands you a copy, but not worth tracking down for pleasure reading, unless you are very into Will Eisner. If you want to read the *Sundiata* story, a better option might be an illustrated version. *Sundiata: Lion King of Mali*, by David Wisniewski looks promising but I haven't read it.

Since his creation of THE SPIRIT and his partner EbonyWhite over 60 years ago, the fame and influence of Sequential Master Will Eisner and his inspired urban fable has frequently been accompanied by the ongoing debate over the nature of THE SPIRIT's gregarious sidekick. Is Ebony a blatant stereotype, or is the durable, likeable mug an African American maverick hampered by -and prevailing despite- the distortions of 1940s racial imagery? It's an engaging question which has lost none of its zeal over the decades. While pondering upon this question about the past, consider the overall worth of all Eisner continues to bring to all literary arenas, Sequential and otherwise. His comprehensive storytelling genius sharper than ever, he has recently embarked upon the distillation of classic literature into Comic page storybooks for young people. Not content with giving the old CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED a stylistic run for its money, Eisner has broken further ground in interpreting one of the most revered of all African folktales, the legend of the Lion of Mali, SUNDIATA. A fine way of introducing young and old alike to this magnificent tale, this graphic album is both signature piece and significant milestone in a long, distinguished career. A profound tale of resilience, ingenuity, and fortitude overcoming all obstacles, SUNDIATA is both earthy and graceful, carrying great subtlety while rolling with flamboyance. In Eisner's hands, the saga of the cripple who rises up to oppose an envious sorcerer's murderous tyranny is imparted with deep dignity, and a winning respect to interest all ages from all persuasions. Over 60 years and still running it strong. Will Eisner. SUNDIATA. Come read this.

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