



Louis Riel: A Comic-Strip Biography

By Chester Brown

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"It has the thoroughness of a history book yet reads with the personalized vision of a novel." –*Time*

Chester Brown reinvents the comic-book medium to create the critically acclaimed historical biography *Louis Riel*, winning the Harvey Awards for best writing and best graphic novel for his compelling, meticulous, and dispassionate retelling of the charismatic, and perhaps insane, nineteenth-century Métis leader. Brown coolly documents with dramatic subtlety the violent rebellion on the Canadian prairie led by Riel, who some regard a martyr who died in the name of freedom, while others consider him a treacherous murderer.

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Louis Riel: A Comic-Strip Biography By Chester Brown Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Brown's exploration of the life of a [...] 19th-century Canadian revolutionary Riel is a strong contender for the best graphic novel ever. Over five years in the making, Brown's work is completely realized here, from the strikingly designed two-color cover to the cream-colored paper and pristinely clear drawings. The story begins in 1869, with the sale of the independent Red River Settlement area of what's now Canada to the Canadian government. The area is inhabited by the French-speaking Metis, of mixed Indian and white ancestry, who are looked down upon by the Canadians. Riel is bilingual and becomes a de facto leader for the Red River Settlement, demanding the right for them to govern themselves within Canada. Not surprisingly, this request is denied, and the conflict is set in motion that ultimately consumes Riel's life. Brown doesn't deviate from a six-panel grid for the entire book, telling his story in a cartoon realism style reminiscent of *Little Orphan Annie*. And while the book concerns imperialism, empire, nationalism and the chaos that results, Brown maintains a still, almost silent atmosphere. He brilliantly renders a lengthy courtroom sequence by setting figures against a black background, heightening the tension of the events by employing minimal effects. Even the battle scenes are subdued. All of this will hook readers' minds and eyes, but never tell them what to think or feel. Instead, Brown calmly lets his story unfold, making the reading process deeply affecting. This is an ingenious comic and a major achievement.

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From [Booklist](#)

Brown, better known for such outre projects as his scatologically surreal *Ed the Happy Clown* (1989), now tells the story of a controversial nineteenth-century Canadian political figure in comics. A charismatic leader who championed the cause of the half-French, half-Native Canadian metis community in their rebellion against the English Canadian government, Riel was hounded into religious fanaticism and madness before being hanged for treason. For his nonsensationalistic treatment of this momentous life, Brown adopts an intentionally flat drawing style reminiscent of 1930s comics (Harold Gray's *Little Orphan Annie* was a key visual influence) and a straightforward storytelling approach based on six square panels per page. These prove perfectly suited to his heavily researched, extensively footnoted subject matter. Although a folk hero in Canada, Riel is largely unknown by Americans, many of whom will be fascinated to learn that their northern neighbor country also cheated and exploited native peoples. Comics artists have tackled history before (see Larry Gonick's *Cartoon History* series) but seldom as artfully and intelligently as Brown does here. *Gordon Flagg*

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Review

“If you love to read a gripping story, if you are awed by the talent of an artist, then look no further: Chester Brown's *Louis Riel* is comix history in the making, and with it, history never looked so good.” *The Globe and Mail Book Review*

“The starkly told story . . . of a crucial figure in Canada's history--yet one whom most Americans have probably never heard of. It's a credit to Brown's plainspoken artistry and flair for narrative that it's a page-turner till the end.” *The Boston Phoenix*

“This is an ingenious comic and a major achievement.” *Publishers Weekly, starred review*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Chad Brown:

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