



Zot!: The Complete Black-and-White Collection: 1987-1991

Scott McCloud

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From comics pioneer Scott McCloud, the complete black and white collection of *Zot!*, featuring never-before-seen artwork and extensive commentary by the author

Long before manga took the American comics market by storm, Scott McCloud (*Understanding Comics, Making Comics*) combined the best ideas from manga, alternative comics, and superheroes into *Zot!*—a frenetic and innovative exploration of comics' potential that helped set the stage for McCloud's later groundbreaking theoretical work.

Zachary T. Paleozogt lives in "the far-flung future of 1965," a utopian Earth of world peace, robot butlers, and flying cars. Jenny Weaver lives in an imperfect world of disappointment and broken promises—the Earth we live in. Stepping across the portals to each other's worlds, Zot and Jenny's lives will never be the same again.

Now, for the first time since its original publication more than twenty years ago, every one of McCloud's pages from the black and white series has been collected in this must-have commemorative edition for aficionados to treasure and new fans to discover.

Zot!: The Complete Black-and-White Collection: 1987-1991 Details

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From Reader Review Zot!: The Complete Black-and-White Collection: 1987-1991 for online ebook

Alana says

This book was unexpectedly loaned to me by a friend who works in the same shopping center that I do. I've read *Understanding Comics* and its sequels, and was only sort of vaguely aware that Scott McCloud had done an actual comic series before writing them.

This wasn't really my thing, but I think it was largely a product of the time it came out of. There was a 'very special episode' quality to some of the more serious stories (a fact that McCloud acknowledges in his commentary), and the less serious stuff was ohmygosh kind of silly and lighthearted in a way that I didn't really know what to do with.

Actually the commentary was really worth reading. For one thing, McCloud is one of the best writers-about-comics that I've read, he's aware of the shortcomings of his youthful endeavors, and his discussions of the areas that he was not pleased with were interesting. I also really enjoyed his breakdown of the six main villains in the story (though I was surprised that he thought the 'ghost in the machine' characters were more frightening and likely than the 'capitalism run amok' ones).

Also, I think McCloud's academic approach to comic making is evident in his drawing and panel layouts. It was cool to see things that he's written about, elements of visual storytelling that I recognize *because* I read 'Understanding Comics', and go, ooh! Look! He's doing that thing! Although I sometimes found that the inclusion of those elements did make the comic feel more academic and less natural.

Tamahome says

Just got it, by the author of *Understanding Comics*. Wow, that's a lot of comics for 20 bucks. Black and white though.

All done. It was uneven in the beginning, but I felt my interest escalate as everything improved working my way to the end. The "director's commentary" every few chapters helped me appreciate it. I wasn't a big fan of the cheesy supervillians except for Dekker, who sees the world in what looks like modern art. Manga influenced, but the author doesn't go overboard on silent panels (sooo overused these days), plus he brings in a lot of other techniques from manga as well. He's also not afraid of words and small panels. Maybe he should sell the 'earth stories' separately. That's the last 3rd where the stories are more about everyday life. I like this technique where he occasionally shifts from a cartoonish face to a more realistic 3d one. An indie but well-drawn black and white comic. I'll be sure to check out his webcomics and the next graphic novel he's working on.

Alan says

I suspect this isn't the most frequent word people use for Scott McCloud's work, but I keep coming back to thinking of *Zot!* as... charming. I was absolutely and undeniably charmed by the wistful, worldly Jenny and her friends on our Earth, and by her cheerful, clueless superhero boyfriend Zot (Zachary T. Paleozogt) and *his* Earth.

McCloud's clean black-and-white drawings, openly influenced by manga style (before that sort of thing became ubiquitous), seamlessly evoke the shining towers and soaring skyways of *Zot!*'s far-flung alternate future 1965, a more-benign version of William Gibson's "Gernsback Continuum." Gibson himself is quoted calling *Zot!* "The classic retrofit of the postwar comic gestalt." *Zot!*'s world bears more than a little resemblance to the land of Faerie, streamlined and chromed for more moderne eyes. But McCloud doesn't ignore the grit and grief of our own urban and messy Earth, either. Especially in later episodes, *Zot!* reflects reality without flinching.

This omnibus edition encompasses the entire monochrome run of McCloud's comic, from 1987 through 1991, with new autobiographical and technical commentary by McCloud. It's full of costume-clad superheroes and super-villains, but it is by no means only that. McCloud's conceit allows him to explore deeper contrasts between what is and what ought to be - and *Zot!*'s world, attractive as it is, does not always come out on top in such comparisons.

This admirable book is not just a fun read, though it is certainly that as well - it also inherently and without fanfare helps establish significance for the graphic format, telling a story that would be very difficult to render as plain text, and prefiguring the case McCloud made more explicit in his landmark analysis, *Understanding Comics*.

And, it's charming.

Jason Pettus says

(Reprinted from the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography [cclapcenter.com]. I am the original author of this essay, as well as the owner of CCLaP; it is not being reprinted illegally.)

Long before Scott McCloud became the guru of comics deconstruction with his wildly popular trilogy of nonfiction titles on the subject (1993's *Understanding Comics*, 2000's *Reinventing Comics* and 2006's *Making Comics*), he was the author of the late-'80s underground hit *Zot!*, an important transitional title between the daring but filthy work that mostly marked this industry in the '70s and the mainstreaming of indie comics in the '90s, but a title that had fallen into almost complete obscurity by our own times; so it's nice to see the almost complete run of the comic (minus its first ten crappy color "proto-issues") repackaged by Harper into a slick, hefty trade paperback, something that I feel deserves to happen to the early work of nearly every artist who manages to survive over the years, for posterity's sake if nothing else. Unfortunately, though, when McCloud mentions in the introduction how inspired he was by the then-unknown "manga" format from Japan (one of the very first American artists to be so, in fact), he doesn't mean the post-apocalyptic hard sci-fi wing of manga but rather the sappy, soap-operaish domestic dramas so loved by

thirteen-year-old girls; and what starts as a fairly clever premise (the adventures of a do-gooder superhero in a parallel-universe New York perpetually stuck in Kennedy/Jetsons Late-Modernist shininess, and how this messes with the superhero's head when he visits our own run-down '80s Manhattan) devolves by its halfway point into an endless series of overly sentimental, overly earnest character studies about small-town New England, literally as if the creators of Superman suddenly decided one day to permanently saddle him in his Clark Kent persona, then make him a minor character in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (yet another inspiration that McCloud specifically references in his introduction by name).

Now, to be fair, even McCloud himself acknowledges most of the weaknesses in *Zot!*, in the fascinating 2008 write-ups he did to accompany each issue; plus I always think it's fair to cut a well-known artist a lot of slack when looking back at their raw, early work, and especially any stuff they might've done for just a small audience back in their twenties, like is the case here. But still, it's important I think to acknowledge the problems this series has, and to let people know that they're not exactly going to be stumbling across some forgotten Postmodernist *Watchmen* masterpiece when picking this up, despite these issues coming out at the same time as Alan Moore's '80s classic and in the early episodes dealing lightly with the same "What Makes Superheroes Really Tick" themes. Fun to read if you have a random chance, and a book I'm glad at least exists, but not something I'd recommend going out of your way to procure.

Out of 10: **7.9**

Alex Sarll says

The comic before *Understanding Comics*, and it's wobbly in all sorts of ways - McCloud will sometimes find his theme and his world-building at odds, the characterisation which makes sense to him isn't always conveyed to us, and he freely admits that some of the plotting is hokey. On top of which, it's a late eighties/early nineties superhero comic, albeit a black and white indie one with strong manga influences, so it was always bound to feel dated in places. But there's still a sense running through it of an artist learning his craft, a thrill of discovery to match *Zot's* own fascination with life. The core idea sounds corny as Hell - a visitor from a better world, teaching a pessimist who lives here that our Earth can be a beautiful place too. And yeah, sometimes it does feel corny. But more often it manages to pull off doing what art's supposed to, and showing us the everyday in a new and compelling light. At times it's a full-on Socratic dialogue in indie superhero clothes (though obviously better, because even in this apprentice work McCloud is ethically and logically superior to Plato*). And then *Zot* gets trapped on our Earth, and you assume from the first couple of stories that it will be all about seeing whether his sunny disposition will hold up now he can't call his uncle and stop it all...but no, he mostly becomes a supporting character as we look more closely at the lives of the supporting cast. And by this point McCloud's evolved massively as both artist and writer, such that 'Autumn' is just gorgeous, and 'Normal' had me bawling on the train, and it pains every bit of defiant reverse snobbery in me to admit that the more slice-of-life *Zot!* is better than the larger-than-life superhero stuff but damn you, critical respectability - you win this round.

Between stories, McCloud also shares his thoughts on the work, and an account of his life as he was making it. Which would be an interesting addition to archival publications in general, wouldn't it? Though I chiefly remain amazed that he was at school with Kurt Busiek. What a class that must have been! Though one detail he doesn't really mention is the way that, for suburban kids back then, many of the leads seem surprisingly open to a faltering exploration of non-monogamous relationships. I wonder if that was drawn from experience, or intended as another of *Zot's* effects on those around him?

*Though when you think about it, who isn't? I mean, even a similarly mendacious prick like Putin at least has the basic grasp of causality to work his wretched will upon the world, which Plato's shambolic arguments suggest he lacked.

Jamil says

It's like reading stories you wrote in high school, slightly uncomfortable, juvenilia for sure, but every so often shot through with moments of beauty that show you knew more than you thought you did, even though you thought you knew everything and really knew nothing at all.

Adan says

What an interesting look at the first work of the man who showed many of us what comics could be. Sometimes overwrought and melodramatic, it was overall pretty great.

Tom Ackerman says

I bought this 550 page graphic novel used from my fav comic shop. Maybe the best five bucks I ever spent! Zot is a treasure. A deconstruction of the superhero genre that is as hopeful as Watchmen is bleak. The commentary from Scott McCloud after each issue is always humble and thoughtful and sometimes emotional. It adds a ton to this collection. If you like comics at all, definitely check out Zot.

Stephen Theaker says

The modern Superman comes in for quite a bit of criticism for being a bit of a metrosexual wimp, but the Superman of the 1950s was as much a product of his time, with his gratingly patriarchal attitude.

Zot, on the other hand, is like a Superman out of time, free of the need to appear in twenty comic books a month or to maintain a status quo. He's happy, comfortable with his powers, accepting of the things he can't change, determined to change the things he can. He has no hang-ups, but is understanding of the hang-ups of others.

This superb and substantial book contains nearly all of his adventures in black and white (leaving out backup strips and a couple of issues drawn by Chuck Austen - though Scott McCloud's layouts are included). The stories are light-hearted, funny and exciting, with a bit of soap opera to keep you going from issue to issue. McCloud's approach to super-heroics and super-villainy is imaginative and innovative.

If the book has one flaw it's that the author's notes, which appear at the end of each story, might have been better collected at the end of the book. They are fascinating, but it feels sometimes as if the author is trying to overdetermine the reader's response, in particular in his attitude to the later issues, which take place almost entirely on Earth.

He obviously loved those issues (as did a lot of readers), but after reading so many notes about how much better the comic is without the superhero stuff, I found those issues rather underwhelming. I much preferred the bulk of the book, in which the relationship stuff is just one element among many.

The art is astounding from start to finish. McCloud uses a variety of approaches to create various effects, but his main mode is a clear line style similar to that seen in Tintin, with a dash of manga expressionism.

All in all, a joy to read, and a feast for the eyes!

Rick says

Before *Understanding Comics*, writer/artist Scott McCloud created the adventures of Zachary T. Paleozogr (aka Zot), a teenager from an alternate Utopian Earth in the "far-flung future of 1965." Zot discovers a portal to our consensus 1980s reality and explores our not-so-perfect existence. He befriends the teen Jenny Weaver and their adventures in both universes serve as the centerpiece for these delightful stories. Initially, the tales primarily revolve around Zot, who is a super-hero in his native land, and the colorful villains he encounters. About two-thirds of the way through this massive 575 page collection, the story focus changes dramatically as Zot gets trapped on our Earth and the stories begin to center around Zot and Jenny's friends. Basically, the series evolves into a high school drama with an exiled super-hero. The Earth Stories, the last sequence title, transforms an entertaining exploration of super hero and science fiction tropes into a superior dramatic comic book. Throughout, McCloud offers explanations and digressions into the individual stories through a series of commentaries and end notes. Perhaps most profoundly, this book grants an insight into the artistic evolution of one of comicdom's greatest ambassadors and educators.

Michael says

Among the small handful of books I've taken from the library that I wouldn't mind owning, there is Zot! Jenny comes from our world, a confused teen with divorcing parents, an indifferent older brother and not many friends. Zot is a ray gun-firing, rocket boot-wearing superhero from a similar world, where apparently all the messy, confusing parts don't exist. The first half of the book goes back and forth between the two universes, mixing sci-fi action with off-beat humorous issues, all the while fitting in plenty of character work. It's solid, but not exceptional comics.

The latter half of the book finds Zot and Jenny stranded on our world, and here, the book takes off, becoming something truly memorable. McCloud narrates entire issues from the perspective of supporting cast members, illustrating their emotional struggles effectively (if sometimes obviously). Particularly effective was the issue in which Jenny's best friend tries to come to terms with being a lesbian. The fake-out last page is a great one. The art's effective, and the characters are believably complex and easy to feel for. The weakest part was probably Woody's confrontation with the one-note, utterly predictable and obvious school bully. That was the only mediocre issue in the entire second portion of the book.

Nick says

I was ready to give this book a bad review, reviling Scott McCloud for ever doing anything but smart

analyses of the comics medium like in *Understanding Comics*. Then, I got to the last third of this graphic novel. The first two thirds of *Zot* consist of McCloud finding himself as a writer and unfortunately that means many of the stories are nonsensical villains of the week combined with overwrought humor. *Zot* himself is pretty boring and the characters around him are meaningless.

Then, two thirds of the way through its run, its like Scott McCloud realized that *Zot* as a character is dull and needed to focus more on human drama. At this point, "Earth Stories" as they're called, this comic takes a *Strangers in Paradise*-esque turn. The stories focus on love, slices of life, and ancillary characters to great success. The cheesy villains have disappeared, and for some reason there's a kid in underwear still hanging around. This makes for a much better comic, it's just a shame that it took Mr. McCloud to progress enough to get to that point in his storytelling.

Dominick says

This book offers a good object lesson in the possibilities and the limits associated with the comics boom of the 1980s/1990s. On the one hand, McCloud's ambition becomes increasingly clear as the series progresses and he tries to move away from the superhero tropes that initially defined it. Even early on, within those tropes, he is trying to shake things up a bit, especially in his depiction of some of the villains, who don't seem so much villains as expressions of philosophical points of view. However, about halfway through, he pretty much abandons what he had been doing and shifts into a series of loosely-connected "issue"-driven (e.g. gayness) stories focusing on characters who hitherto had been secondary or even non-existent, with the supposed hero, the eponymous *Zot*, pushed mostly to the background. McCloud thereby tries to redefine, if not transcend, the superhero genre, by making it about real (or "real") people, not costumed adventurers. And he does do some nice work, notably with increasingly complex visuals.

What he doesn't do, however, is a coherent story. Things that seemed to be building in the first part are just abandoned when the book shifts gears. And then, the stories in the second half never really add up to anything. As individual stories intended to be read serially, one a month, they are fine, but when one reads them gathered together like this, their limits become clear. McCloud was working towards the graphic novel, but still stuck with open-ended serialization as the publication method; and he wanted to move away from superheroes but couldn't quite let go of the gimmick. When he finished the series, it does not feel like an end so much as a stop.

His notes on the series do acknowledge its limitations, which is nice to see. He makes no grand claims for his accomplishments. Said accomplishments are modest here--worthwhile, occasionally interesting, but ultimately . . . well, shallow.

Dani Shuping says

You may only be familiar with Scott McCloud's work for his critically acclaimed, *Understanding Comics*, and if that's all you know him for you're really missing out. *Zot* is a fantastic comic series and one that I wish I had read sooner.

Zot is a teenage superhero from an alternate Earth, where laser guns and transformation guns are everyday, and the world has evolved to a more idealistic place. *Zot* comes to our world where he meets Jenny, an

everyday teenage girl who just wants to escape from our everyday world. As the series progresses we see more of Zot's world and how it compares to our own. And as Scott's style matures we see Zot and Jenny discussing a wide range of topics from the normal everyday to sex, gender identity, and death. At one point in the series Zot is stuck in our world with no way to get back to his own. But that doesn't stop him from trying to take to make this Earth a better place, even though our world still has guns and people turn a blind eye to pain and suffering sometimes.

This is not your average superhero comic. While in the beginning Zot seems like the typical superhero, as the series progresses we come to realize he isn't. Nor is Jenny just an average girl. Together the two of them explore issues that every reader can relate too, even those that we're often afraid to discuss. And Scott was clearly ahead of his time in having his characters openly discuss not just sexuality, but sexual preferences as well. Scott has created a world where frank discussions can happen and give hope that all is not lost. And although McCloud may think some of his early art is rough...I think he's mistaken. His artwork captures a full range of human emotions and displays a sense of hope, depth, and power that some of the artists of today's comics just can't pull off.

This is a must read, even if you don't like superheroes. Give Zot a chance to make you see the world in a different way.

Dan Schwent says

While the first ten issues of Zot! were great with their innocence and sense of golden age superhero nostalgia, what got me interested in the first place were the b&w earth stories of the later issues. Zot gets trapped in Jenny's world and interacts with her collection of misfit friends and deals with real life issues. These issues of Zot helped pave the way for stuff like Strangers in Paradise and Ed Brubaker's Lowlife. Great stuff. Highest possible recommendation if you're into comic that aren't vanilla superhero fare.
