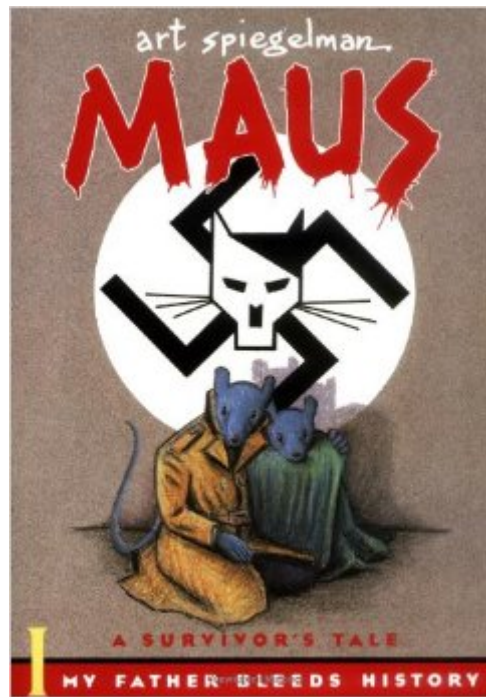


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My Father Bleeds History



Synopsis

A story of a Jewish survivor of Hitler's Europe and his son, a cartoonist who tries to come to terms with his father's story and history itself.

Book Information

Series: Maus (Book 1)

Paperback: 159 pages

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Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars See all reviews (608 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,617 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #2 in Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Graphic Novels > Literary #3 in Books > Arts & Photography > History & Criticism > History #4 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > Jewish

Customer Reviews

This is a powerful work. The tale of a young man's painful relationship with his father is elegantly interwoven with the father's recollection of life as a Jew in Nazi-occupied Poland. Spiegelman's skill and honesty make this a raw, gut-wrenching read, though the tale is somehow ultimately uplifting. I first read this book as a teenager, and would highly recommend it to people of any age. Over the years, I have re-read it frequently and shared it with friends of all ages. All have taken much from Spiegelman's tale. A few notes must be made in response to the 10/26/97 comment posted below by a reviewer from Ontario, Canada. It is quite clear that this reviewer did not, in fact, read the book. (S)he mistakenly attacks Spiegelman for portraying the Poles as rats, and wonders if he would be offended if a book were written portraying Jews as rats. Anyone who took the time to read Maus (or merely to examine its cover!) would know that it is, in fact, the Jewish people who are portrayed as mice/rats, whereas the Poles are portrayed not as vermin, but rather as pigs. In fact, far from a "vicious" attack against Poles, there are many acts of kindness by Polish people portrayed in the book. Certainly there is unkindness as well, but how can the reviewer forget that this is a factual account of Vladek Spiegelman's life, told from his perspective. If unkind acts by Polish people are a part of that life, then they should be in the book. Finally, the reviewer in question inelegantly raises a

point of some merit, though it is one that is only tangentially related to Spiegelman's work. The Polish people did, in fact, suffer horribly at the hands of both Nazis and Soviets alike.

As a history and literature major, I wrote my senior thesis on *Maus* and *Maus II* because, after reading them for a class, I couldn't stop thinking about them. The imagery, both drawn and implied, was masterful. Each panel tells the story of the Holocaust as SOMEONE REMEMBERS IT. Spiegelman took his father's story and graphically interpreted it in an incredibly moving way. He did not write a work of historical fact (for whatever those books are worth anyway - even history is a work of memory and interpretation). I love these graphic novels for what they are - brilliant literature and testimony. I was looking over some of these reviews of *Maus* because I am going to see Spiegelman speak this weekend and just wanted to know what others had said in the past. I was disheartened to read some of the negative responses to the use of animal caricatures, especially since I have always felt this was the most ingenious part of the works. Looking at these reviews, though, I remembered an interview with Spiegelman I read a while back. He explains the animal caricatures a bit, and I thought it might be beneficial to place a quote here, in this forum. Published in *The Comics Journal*, October 1991: Spiegelman says of the animal portrayals, "These images are not my images. I borrowed them from the Germans. At a certain point I wanted to go to Poland, and I had to get a visa. I put in my application, and then I got a call from the consul. He said 'the Polish attache wants to speak with you.' And I knew what he wanted to talk to me about. On the way over there, I tried to figure out what I was going to say to him. 'I wanted to draw noble stallions, but I don't do horses very well?' When I got there, he gave me the perfect opening. He said, 'You know, the Nazis called us schwein' (German for pig).

First of all, if you've read or are reading the other reviews, ignore the blather about how the whole "Animal Farm" metaphor--Jews as mice, Germans as cats, etc.--being racist and demeaning. Art Spiegelman attempts to tell the story of his father Vladek's life in Hitler's Europe. By and large, the book is a detailed, objective retelling of his Vladek's story. However, as Art himself will realize, "I can't even make sense out of my relationship with my father--how am I supposed to make sense out of the Holocaust?" and "Reality is much too complex for comics--so much has to be left out or distorted." Thus liberated from the impossible standard of complete objectivity, Art is free to insert two important subjective elements into the story--the depiction of different races as different species, and the insertion of himself as a character in *MAUS*. Obviously, Art is not an overt racist--in fact, in the second part of *MAUS*, Art will scold his father for distrusting a black person, and a German-Jewish

couple will help Vladek return home after being freed from the death camps. The point of portraying Jews as mice, Germans as cats, Poles as pigs, etc. is to show what race relations during Hitler's Europe might have been like. The characterization of race doesn't end there, though--as the scene shifts from Nazi Germany to the present, and as Art must suffer the daily trials and tribulations of life with a father permanently scarred by his experiences, Art depicts himself as a mouse as well, a confession that he himself is unable to completely escape the aftermath of the poisoned race relations of the Holocaust. Maybe this makes him a covert racist. But if he is, then who isn't? Art's involvement in MAUS goes beyond interviewing his father, though.

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