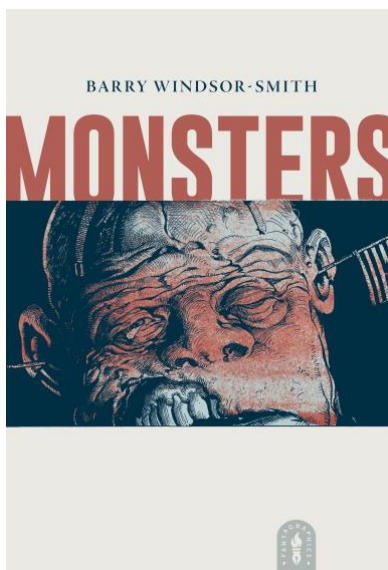


Review: Monsters

by Barry Windsor-Smith. Fantagraphics, April 2021. 380 p. ill. ISBN 9781683964155 (h/c), \$39.99.

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Monsters takes place between WWII and 1964 and tells the story of Bobby Bailey, who experienced abuse and tragedy as a child before applying to join the army. He is immediately whisked away to participate in an extremely dangerous and top-secret experimental military science project called Prometheus. The people who tell Bobby's story for him are his mother, Janet, and military men Elias McFarland and Jack Powell. McFarland's family worries for him in 1964, while the Bailey family has their own problems to deal with in 1945. The story is not presented in chronological order, and Bobby himself remains alienated throughout, barely speaking and never given agency.

Everything about this book is heavy and overwhelming. Physically, it's the size of a textbook. The pages are thick, the text and the storytelling are dense, the art style is masterfully hand drawn with pen and black ink. The story deals with intergenerational trauma, childhood abuse, domestic violence, and Nazi war crimes.

Monsters is less about what makes a monster and more about how trauma is a self-perpetuating cycle. Trauma denies agency, which causes isolation and rage, which then carries over into other relationships. It's a slow and weighty read, but each reading is bound to reveal new details and connections. The one weak point is the lettering, as it overuses bold italic emphasis. The art is great, delicate and tender and clunky and grotesque, even bulbous in weird places. The lighting is beautifully rendered and the details are consistent. It's no wonder this took 30 years to make.

This book is a great addition to art book and graphic novel collections for young adults and older. It is not suitable for kids, but *Monsters* is a great example of a self-contained, artistically stunning graphic novel that challenges the format of the genre.