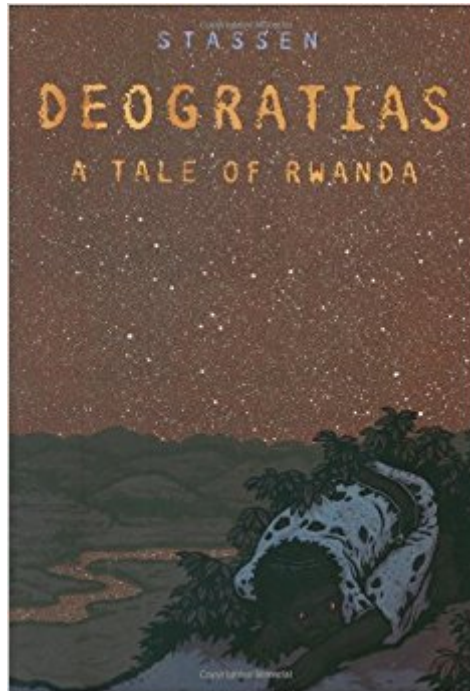




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Deogratias, A Tale Of Rwanda



Synopsis

The 2000 winner of the Goscinn Prize for outstanding graphic novel script, this is the harrowing tale of the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda, as seen through the eyes of a boy named Deogratias. He is an ordinary teenager, in love with a girl named Bāfāñigne, but Deogratias is a Hutu and Bāfāñigne is a Tutsi who dies in the genocide, and Deogratias himself plays a part in her death. As the story circles around but never depicts the terror and brutality of an entire country descending into violence, we watch Deogratias in his pursuit of Bāfāñigne, and we see his grief and descent into madness following her death, as he comes to believe he is a dog. Told with great artistry and intelligence, this book offers a window into a dark chapter of recent human history and exposes the West's role in the tragedy. Stassen's interweaving of the aftermath of the genocide and the events leading up to it heightens the impact of the horror, giving powerful expression to the unspeakable, indescribable experience of ordinary Hutus caught up in the violence. Difficult, beautiful, honest, and heartbreaking, this is a major work by a masterful artist.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Deogratias means "thanks be to God," and it's the name of a boy coming of age in Rwanda in 1994. He is just figuring out what it means to be a man, and wrestling with the feelings he harbors toward two sisters, Apollinaria and Benina. The sisters are themselves struggling to establish their own place in society and understand the difficult decisions their mother, Venetia, has made. Apollinaria's real father is a white Catholic priest, and Venetia has been forced to

leave the country in the past to save her daughters. But Deogratias is Hutu, and they are Tutsi, a simple fact that renders all of their internal battles irrelevant. This award-winning comic was originally published in Belgium in 2000 and has an introduction explaining the history leading to the Rwandan genocide. The heartbreaking power of Deogratias is how it keeps the reader distant from the atrocities by showing the trivial cruelties of everyday life before and after the genocide. Stassen is a journalist who lives in Rwanda, and his art is bold and clear, using different color palettes to seamlessly shift between before and after. There is no catharsis, only the realization that even justice turns its champion into a monster. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Grade 10 Up
In this harrowing fictionalized account of the Rwandan genocide, readers meet Deogratias, a teenaged Hutu. His friends Benina and Apollinaria are Tutsi, a race that is being ethnically cleansed by Hutu extremists. As the conflict escalates, Deogratias witnesses murders and is forced to become involved in brutal acts of violence. He suffers a mental breakdown. The story is told through a series of flashbacks while he skates the line between rational and insane. Stassen spares his readers none of the brutality and visceral cruelties of this atrocity. Scenes of rape, harsh language, and some sexual content solidly designate this book for a mature audience. An introduction sets the backdrop and explains the historical significance of the period. This is one of the most intense, gripping graphic novels to date; libraries with other factually themed titles, such as those by Joe Sacco, Marjane Satrapi, and Art Spiegelman, should purchase it. A masterful work with vibrant, confident art, this book will stay with and haunt its readers.
Jennifer Feigelman, Goshen Public Library and Historical Society, NY Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

There is something about a graphic novel depiction of a horrible situation, war, genocide, etc, that stays with you for a long time. I think it might be the fact that "comics" are assumed to be fun and light-hearted, but graphic novels and even comics have taken a whole new approach. They don't limit themselves to fun, slight stories. They can be dark, serious, and very, very real. Jean-Philippe Strassen's graphic depiction of the Rwandan genocide will stay with you long after you have read the last frame. Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda is a powerful book. The story is told in two parts. It shows the life of Deogratias, a young Hutu man who has been driven mad by the genocide, and it shows his life before the genocide in constant flashbacks. Deogratias was in love with Apollinaria, but when she turned him down, he started dating her younger sister Benina. He loved

both girls. It didn't matter to him that they were Tutsi and he was Hutu, or how their mother made her money to support them. When the President's plane is shot down and the genocide begins, Deogratias hides Benina in his house, but she cannot stay there without knowing what happened to her mother and her sister. The present time shows Deogratias, or what is left of him. He is still a young boy, but he has been driven mad by the things he has seen and the things he has done during the genocide. The people in the village treat him like a pet, a dirty stray dog. At night is when his demons haunt him and he drowns them with local banana beer. It isn't until the very end of the book, after witnessing Deogratias' flashbacks and loss into madness, that you see the return of a foreign priest who fled before the genocide got really bad. With his return, you learn the truth of what happened during the genocide to cause Deogratias' madness. The illustrations in this book are dark and scary. There are times at the beginning where it is hard to tell what is happening, especially when you see Deogratias start to transform under the stars into a dog. The flashbacks give you part of the story bit by bit, and you have to puzzle everything together. Because you have grown to care and worry about Deogratias, learning the truth about his time in the genocide is very painful. Unfortunately, this is a very true depiction of what happened in Rwanda in 1994. Hutus who lived and worked with Tutsis for their entire lives were forced to kill their family and neighbors to avoid being killed themselves. It is hard to digest, but not because it is a graphic story (although it is), but rather because it is a true story. I think this story is an incredibly important story for any young adult to read. Because of the horrifying nature of the genocide itself, it would need to be handled with background knowledge and sensitivity for the reader. The introduction by the translator gives a wonderful summary of what was happening in Rwanda during the time before, during and after the genocide. It is perfect for any student who isn't familiar with the events in Rwanda in 1994. The story can be violent and sexually explicit, but that is simply the nature of a genocide where rape was a tool for torture and murder was committed on a scale that is unheard of- 800,000 people in a few short months. So while you might be worried about giving this to a younger student, I understand your concerns, but think the benefits far outweigh the possible concerns, especially if it is taught well and with a strong purpose. I plan to use this graphic novel in my Rwanda unit this year, and am interested to see how my students handle it.

Great book, great story... Item arrived in excellent condition!

Deep and stunning. Conflict kills us all. I wasn't expecting this kind of story.

Interesting perspective of the Rwandan genocide. Gives a personal touch to the aftermath of the conflict. Enjoyed the sequence of the panels as well going between present and past.

This is a graphic novel about the genocide in Rwanda. I liked the informational introduction. It was well done and very informative. That said, I did not like the book itself. The artwork didn't touch me, the story was confusing and unappealing, and I did not get anything out of it.

Originally published in Stassen's native Belgium in 2000, this graphic novel takes on the 1994 Rwandan genocide and does a credible job of bringing the horror of that dark stain on recent history to the page. Alternating between the time of the genocide and a time about five years after it, the story follows a young Hutu teenager named Deogratias. Prior to the massacre, we see he is a normal boy trying to get into the pants of two pretty Tutsi sisters. However, in the aftermath of the genocide, he has been reduced to a homeless, ragtag lunatic with only moments of lucidity, who tries to keep horrible memories at bay with the aid of the local banana beer (urwagwa). Those familiar with the kinds of atrocities perpetrated in genocides or civil wars won't be particularly surprised at the final revelation as to what rendered him insane -- nonetheless, it's grim and powerful stuff. There's also a subplot involving a French tourist who served in the French army in Rwanda during the genocide. This exists mainly to highlight the French complicity in allowing the genocide to unfold -- albeit guilt that is only marginally greater than that of other Western powers. What happened in Rwanda serves to point out the emptiness of slogans such as "Never Forget", and while it has been covered by many excellent non-fiction books and films, Stassen is to be commended for bringing the horrific story to another medium. This is rough material, definitely not for kids, although the translator's introduction does a nice job of providing enough background for one to use it in a high school history or ethics class.

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