



Three

Kieron Gillen

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In ancient Sparta, three Helot slaves run for their lives! Pursuing them are three hundred of their Spartan masters! Kieron Gillen (Phonogram, Iron Man), Ryan Kelly (Local, Saucer Country), and Jordie Bellaire (The Manhattan Projects, Nowhere Men) join forces to tell a legend for our times. Includes cover gallery, making of material, and annotations. This story takes place during the events of 300.

Collects THREE #1-5

Three Details

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From Reader Review Three for online ebook

Eric Rosenfield says

A fine antidote to 300, where the Spartans mission to kill three rebellious slaves exposes their fabled society's underbelly.

Loki says

A typically thoughtful and dense work by Gillen, who has a real talent for writing genuinely fun and light action with a lot going on under the surface. This particularly work tells the story of three Helots (slaves) and their escape from Sparta. It's very much a counterpoint to Frank Miller's 300, telling a more nuanced story of what life in Sparta was like. To say much more would be to spoil it.

It also includes extensive notes by Gillen, in his typically wry, modest and well-informed style, and a conversation between him and Stephen Hodkinson, one of the world's leading authorities on Sparta and a researcher for this book.

Wendy says

Set after Frank Miller's 300, we are introduced to a Sparta that is not quite as pleasant and honourable as it once was. At the bottom of the scale, treated as less than slaves, are the helots. But three helots manage to escape the wrath of a legion of Spartans, after massacring the group and their esteemed leader. They are hunted for their actions, and in the course of their journey, we learn bits and pieces of actual history, as well as some of the secrets of the main characters, one of whom is more than he seems.

It is an interesting and somewhat informative story, but the amount of detail overwhelms the actual story. I never really understood why the Spartans would spend such time and resources hunting down three slaves, or why they felt the need to massacre the helots in this village in the first place. The character relationships were confusing, and it becomes unbelievable when one the slave with the warrior past takes on all those Spartans.

Annice22 says

Borrowed for Publisher/NetGalley for an honest review.

This was better than I thought it would be. It was an interesting story about three Helot slaves trying to find their way to freedom but are being pursued by Spartan soldiers.

A well-written story with really good art.

Lono says

I am a fan of Miller's 300. The thing I liked about Miller's book is the same thing I appreciate about **THREE**. Not that it's about Spartans, war, or is historically accurate. It's a story about self-mastery, courage, and sacrifice. Both stories deliver in that regard.

THREE flips the coin and makes the Spartans of Miller's epic the "Persians" of this tale and three Helot slaves its champions. It is readily apparent that Gillen researched the Sparta's historical mistreatment of their slaves and the Spartans inevitable fall from glory. There are a lot of other things in the book that are deliberately reminiscent of 300 as well. Gillen isn't mirroring these things in an attempt to ride Miller's coattails, he is deliberately showing them from the much different perspective of a Helot slave. Gillen does a great job in developing the three main characters throughout the story, revealing bits and pieces of their past as it moves along. The ending and the final fate of the "three" was also especially satisfying for me.

Kelly's art was also well suited for the story and appropriately bloody where necessary. Overall he did a good job.

Whether or not it was Gillen was giving Miller the bird with this story or not doesn't really matter much to me. The Spartans, like EVERY country in the world, had moments of renowned triumph and shameful infamy. I like **THREE** because it exalts bravery and sacrifice and condemns subjugation. All while telling a memorable story.

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Robert says

You know what gets "Three" all five of the stars?

End-notes, biotches.

Obviously delving into the same fraught historical terrain as "300" was going to be a challenge but to my mind Gillen admirably rose to it and was willing to share his research process as well as own what parts were factual (or as factual you can get during an era in which only a small percentage of people were literate and the victors wrote the histories) and which were his speculations.

I enjoyed the simple, Wild West-style story of the escape of the titular Three oppressed helots and the unsavory culture and machinations of the Spartan state intent of stopping them at all cost, as well.

If you loved "300", give this a try and don't feel you are besmirching Leonidas's Mighty Memory in reading it. For one thing, it takes place more than a century after Thermopylae, and for another it is always worthwhile remembering that there are multiple sides to every story and that, yes indeed, the Past is a very foreign country.

Eric says

If you're looking at reviews of *Three* chances are you've read, or more likely seen, 300. After you did so chances are your curiosity (or one of your buddies') was piqued enough to do some research on ancient Sparta and Spartan culture. And chances are your reaction to learning what a *Fucked up* ancient civilization Sparta was was similar to mine: a mix of horror and shame for enjoying the obvious glorification Millar engaged in by telling his fictionalized account of the Battle of Thermopylae. (Seriously, it's like a story that glorifies Ghenghis Khan's Mongol Empire and their incredible military feats while paying lip service to the atrocities they committed).

Clearly Kieron Gillen, Ryan Kelly, and Jordie Bellaire felt this way since this five issue miniseries is a blatant "Fuck you," to 300, Frank Millar, and Zack Snyder. My only critique is they didn't go *far enough* highlighting all the ways Sparta was a real-life nightmarish dystopia. But, I guess they didn't want to draw too much attention away from their chase story of three Helots running for their lives from the wrath of three hundred Spartans by shining a light on Sparta's institutionalized pederasty and such.

3 3/4 stars

Sam Quixote says

This book feels like a massive fuck you to Frank Miller – but more on that later!

Set in the years following the Battle of Thermopylae when 300 Spartans held the Hot Gates against the massive Persian army, Sparta has become a much less glorious land of "true warriors". It no longer has the fearsome reputation it once had as Spartans now flee the battlefield and its vastly incompetent and cowardly king.

The Helots were Sparta's slaves who economically supported Sparta with agricultural work. They bore the brunt of Sparta's cruel culture and were often humiliated and murdered – a ritual held every autumn called the Crypteia allowed Spartans to freely kill Helots for sport without punishment.

During Crypteia, some Spartans appear at a Helot hovel and things get out of hand. But rather than take the punishment once again, three Helots stand up to the Spartans and kill them all – save one who manages to escape. The solitary Spartan makes it back and alerts his king of the three Helots' behaviour and the king raises 300 warriors and heads off to punish the Helots.

Three is an interesting inversion of 300's story where the Spartans have gone from being the heroic

underdogs to villainous oppressors and the Helots have taken the narrative place of the original 300. It's like Kieron Gillen wants to show everyone who enjoyed 300 (myself included) that, by the way, the Spartans were psychos, not heroes, and that it's a damn good thing their culture failed to endure.

The finale becomes even more 300-esque when the three Helots – Klaros, Damar and Terpander – are tricked into a dead end by a turncoat (a space “no more than a goat-herder’s path” – sound familiar?) but manage to hold off the Spartans (wearing the classic Leonides armour) thanks to the cave’s narrow entrance, like a miniature version of the Hot Gates themselves.

I might be reading too much into it but because Three feels so very heavily influenced by Frank Miller’s 300, I wondered if the final scene of the book is a commentary on Miller himself – in the same way Sparta becomes a mere shadow of its once glorious self, that a once great artist has fallen so hard and become the same.

Yet for all its similarities to 300, it’s a far more compassionate with characters who seem more real and human than Miller’s unstoppable warriors. Gillen critiques the society the Spartans were fighting to preserve from the Persians in the first place by focusing on the injustice and cruelty practiced by the Spartans on the human beings they treated like animals, whose already desperate lives were ruined by sadistic thugs with twisted values. And yet it’s the same story of a small group of people who stand up to overwhelming numbers of oppressors and say “we will not submit – we will fight!”.

Three is a sobering and thoughtful coda to the story of Sparta, a story that has been represented in recent popular culture as all chest-beating macho bravado and glory and yet which ended so weakly in real life. A compelling and fascinating comic with great writing and art, Three is an excellent comic that’s well worth reading.

Craig says

Kind of the flipside to the rah-rah heroics in Frank Miller’s 300, this graphic novel shows the downside of the Spartan empire and way of life. The story follows a group of three Helots, part of a slave class who were treated brutally by their Spartan masters, who escape the aftermath of the massacre of a party of Spartans who had taken refuge in a Helot dwelling for the night. The Spartan leader had taken exception to the story one of the Helots had told around the campfire and ordered his men to slay all of them, only to have that backfire as one of the Helots, an apparent cripple, turned out to be anything but. So the three are on the run from a force of 300 Spartans who aim to make an example of them. Along the way, we get a number of insights into the declining empire and can see that the Spartan approach to life really isn’t going to work in the long-term. Some good, spare artwork and a nice, simple story. This was obviously written with some care, as there are numerous footnotes at the end of the volume and even an interview with an expert on Spartan history who lent some of his expertise to the story.

Wayne McCoy says

The graphic novel 'Three' by Kieron Gillen serves as a sort of rebuttal to '300' and our current obsession with the Spartans. It's a very well researched graphic novel, and while the story is fictional, it serves to show an empire in decline.

When a village of Helots is belittled and humiliated by visiting Spartan overlords, a few fight back. Three Helots find themselves on the run with 300 Spartans in pursuit. They are trying to get to Messene and freedom. The three are an overly talkative man, a woman and a man who appears to be a cripple. They all have strengths that will help the others. They will show incredible courage.

The extras include a cover gallery, an in-depth discussion by page of the historical details, and a great interview with Professor Stephen Hodkinson, a scholar who has studied Sparta since the early 1970s.

Combine Kieron Gillen's well researched and well told story with Ryan Kelly's great art, and you have a very fine graphic novel indeed. I really enjoyed this one.

I was given a review copy of this graphic novel by Diamond Book Distributors and Netgalley in exchange for an honest review. Thank you for allowing me to review this great graphic novel.

Adam Šilhan says

Krom? samotného p?íb?hu oce?uji poznámkovou sekci k život? ve Spart?. Nejen zábavné, ale i informa?n? p?ínosné.

Daniel says

This review originally published in Looking For a Good Book. Rated 3.5/5

Three is a thoughtful, well-researched graphic novel quite reminiscent of the book and film *300*, but choosing to look at the vainglorious, down-fall years of Sparta.

The book is told from the viewpoint of the Helots. The Helots were the slaves of the Spartans, and like many slave-owners, the Spartans failed to realize that it was often the work of the slaves that supported them, economically, at least. The Helots begin to realize their own power just as the Spartans begin to lose theirs.

This story has a group of Spartan soldiers enter a tavern and decide, as is their wont, to slaughter the Helots within. One Helot, a cripple, decides to fight back with the help of two others, including a woman. One Spartan makes it out alive and reports to the king what has happened. The king sends 300 to put an end to what could be an up-rising, and the three are hunted throughout the book.

During the hunt, the Spartans take out one of their own, for failing to live up to their own code of honor and glory. It's a nice set-up to their own down-fall...the failure or one to be honorable, and the failure to respect leadership.

The ending is not super-heroic, but certainly worthy of respect.

The art is really quite nice for this book. There was a 'classic' 70's feel to the book which I felt leant well to the classic nature of the story.

The Helots did seem to be a little stronger than I expected them to be. For three, barely armed slaves to take

out a squad of Spartans, even if they did have surprise on their side, seemed super-human, and their language and manners certainly didn't make them appear as slaves. But what we do get, is a sense of humanity. The Spartans were not gods, but men, capable of failure and a down-fall. And the Helots were not animals, but men (and women) capable of over-coming their lot. I don't recall reading a graphic novel that identified the human condition this well.

The last thirty pages or so of this book include a page-by-page historical footnote; a 'conversation'; a sample of the layout and design of the book; and bios of the three responsible for the bulk of the book (writer, artist, colorist). I found it mostly interesting. The historical footnotes definitely lend credence to the amount of research that went in to the book.

Looking for a good book? *Three* is a historical fiction graphic novel that speaks to what it can mean to be human during a turbulent time of a once great civilization.

Bogdan says

For those interested in Spartan history this volume has a big amount of informations and details.

Not a bad story. The artwork also wasn't especially bad, but not so great either.

Three stars!

Online Eccentric Librarian says

More reviews (and no fluff) on the blog <http://surrealtalvi.wordpress.com/>

Three is an interesting graphic novel: clearly well researched history, with footnotes and chatty discussion of the culture at the back. Yet it is also an antidote both to the modern hero worship of the Spartan culture as well as the Frank Miller novel 300. For this is about the decline and insanity of Sparta as mostly told through its slaves and victims.

Story: Taking place in 364BC, after Thermopylae and the 300 storyline, Sparta has become a shadow of its former glory. When three slaves suddenly find they have to defend against their Spartan masters, they find themselves hunted and on the run by rulers who need to make an example to all the other slaves (the Helots). But things will not turn out well either for the slaves or the King sent after them.

The book is a bit wordy for my taste and for slaves, these are very well spoken people indeed. The characters also fall into so many cliches: the 'bard' talking with flowery words, the swordsman with curt sentences, the lone woman muttering under her breath all the time, the military leaders all braggadocio and no sense .. I wish the characters had been a little better drawn out. I just didn't believe any of them - especially when a slave mouths off to the masters and puts them down. I doubt anyone living under the heel of armed men is

that stupid? So it becomes a deus ex machina to start a brawl that culminates in the slaves being hunted for murder.

So while I appreciated the historical aspect and learned quite a lot, I can't say I was bowled over, either. There are a few gems in there: a great end to one of the slaves, for example, was very unexpected. I also really appreciate how many insights, in-jokes, and more there are, each making pithy comments about history or historical characters.

Ultimately, this book will find itself being constantly compared Miller's *300*. But unlike its more melodramatic counterpart, *Three* is very straightforward in both art and storytelling. That is its best asset but also perhaps a bit of its weakness as well.

The art feels very 'Conan" with square jawed men and beautiful wome. I kept feeling these were drawn by Boris Vallejo at times, they have a strong retro 1970s/1980s feel. But it is also easy to follow and conveys the story well.

In all, I was glad to read this and it is something that will bear up to multiple readings. Included in the back are commentary, interviews, and Layouts/Design.

SmokingMirror says

Like much of Gillen's comic book writing, *Three* is a dense read, well worth rereading. It is one of the most page turning books I have come across in months. Kelly's art and Bellaire's colours are both first rate.

Sparta was a society whose basis was fear. As admirable as Spartan *arête*, military virtues, and piety unspoiled by greed may seem, the Spartan state was the rule of an elite over those they considered inferior. That rule was enforced through military domination abroad and terrorizing a population of hereditary slaves at home. This is the other side of *300*; I think the helots are owed a story from their point of view

I have some questions about the rendering of the statues, not for the painted aspect, but for style. The Dioscurides seem too Hellenistic for the period, but I really have little idea of Spartan religious statuary. (Except for Artemis Orthia: isn't her statue hacked from wood?) I really enjoyed the discussion with the Professor of Spartan and Pelopponese Studies--I was so taken aback that there is such a specialized department anywhere. He had little but good words for the story by Gillen and the rest, and I would go along with him on that.
