



El Borbah

Charles Burns

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Meet El Borbah, a 400-pound private eye who wears a Mexican wrestler's tights and eerie mask. Subsisting entirely on junk food and beer, El Borbah conducts his investigations with tough talk and a short temper. He smashes through doors and skulls as he stalks a perfectly realized film-noir city filled with punks, geeks, business-suited creeps and mad scientists.

El Borbah features five science-fiction and true-detective episodes: In "Robot Love," rebellious kids in nightclubs replace their "parts" with mechanical substitutes as part of a new fad, only to find that their parents have been automating themselves all along; in "Love in Vein" a mad visionary sperm donor plans a master race and turns "his" kids against their parents; "Bone Voyage" details the exploits of a cult called the Brotherhood of the Bone, a kind of cross between the Masons and the Mansons. The fantastic plots take up the weird fears of a scientific society, but the action is pure pulp. Charles Burns effortlessly spins yarns with gritty punchlines and pictures so perfect they must have existed in some collective memory of junk drama. And through it all crashes El Borbah, trying to make an honest buck from dishonest people.

Burns is the author of *Black Hole*, the acknowledged masterpiece of the form that Fantagraphics serialized through the 1990s and will be collected into a massive graphic novel in 2005 by Pantheon Books. *El Borbah* is Burns' earliest work, created in the early 1980s, though the work remains eerily contemporary. Steeped in a "sci-fi-noir" aesthetic informed by Burns' steadily childhood diet of B-movies and comic books, but with a sophisticated sense of humor that is often as disturbing as it is funny, *El Borbah* is comics as its most entertaining.

El Borbah Details

Date : Published January 17th 2006 by Fantagraphics (first published 1987)

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From Reader Review El Borbah for online ebook

Thurston Hunger says

Not too far off my Flaming Carrot fixation. Hard-boiled absurdist hero/detective solves crimes of greedy corporate factions and seedy science fictions. Is damn shame Orson Welles is not around to direct and star in the movie versions of these...

Vanessa says

A masked Mexican wrestler detective... what more could you ask for?

Pawe? P says

Simple yet weird tales in the whole lot weirder shape. Not that I didn't expect that from Burns. Maybe it's just time that works on his disadvantage. El Borbah is kidna like Hellboy - phisically strong detective, conducting investigations in the land of strangeness.

Michael says

Early Charles Burns collected. It's offbeat, bizarre, on the edge of good taste. A private dick who wears a Mexican wrestling match investigates a variety of cases - the stories are all entertaining. It's no *Black Hole*, but it's creepy fun. The art's quite good; not up to Burns' current levels, but still better than most, and still very twisted.

Mickey says

Came to Charles Burns late. I like this one least, but should should qualify that as being the least among an insanely beautiful oeuvre. If you pick this one to begin you might love it...my friend does, anyway...not my favorite, but still superb and original.

Jason Bradshaw says

This is a collection of all of the noir-esque crime stories featuring Burns' hard-boiled Mexican wrestler/detective for hire, El Borbah, that were originally published in Raw and Heavy Metal magazines respectively.

The stories here are pretty straight noir, but everything is just a bit off. El Borbah, the protagonist in all of

these stories, plays into most of the hard boiled detective troupes – he's basically a tough that won't take shit from anybody – and also, for some reason, happens to be a Mexican wrestler. All of the cases he takes on, too, just end up in these really bizarre places with adults with baby heads, robot parents or strange wishbone cults.

Burns' art really lends itself to these stories particularly well, too, with really heavy blacks and strange character designs that just lend a whole other level of eerie to what's already there.

Great, classic Burns comics.

Jon Hewelt says

Man, this was so much fun. Amidst the body grotesquery, Charles Burns can be quite a serious and meaningful author. so it's great to see him cut loose and just have some manic adventures.

El Borbah goes to some strange-ass places, and I loved every minute of reading it.

Chris says

Prior to this, the only work I've read by Charles Burns was Black Hole - I was entirely unprepared for El Borbah. The main character is crass, violent, and not incredibly bright, while the story lines are random, dark, awkward, and painfully amusing. This is a fantastic collection; Charles Burns is a brilliant author and artist - he couldn't write enough of this stuff to satisfy my interest.

David Schaafsma says

I just finished Burns's most recent 3 volume trilogy, ending with Sugar Skull, and found it pretty amazing. So, glancing over what I had never read from Burns, I found this, which is the same size and colored similarly on the cover (the actual stories are black and white, and would be improved by being in garish color), and it is more than 30 years old, rereleased in 2010. It has the same funny nightmare weirdness of Sugar Skull series, but is a kind of mashup of horror/fantasy/noir/Mexican wrestling/Tin Tin/fifties pre-Comics code comic "moral degradation," so what's not to like, right? And it is fun, with crude tough noir dialogue and violence and it is often funny, too. I think Burns's later effort seems "better" to me, or it's more for my current tastes, in that it deals with more serious themes, early mistakes, regret, a blend of nightmare/acid flashbacks/youth memory and wild imagination, instead of just wild storytelling. El Borbah is all fun, and some will like that even better, I am guessing.

Anthony Vacca says

Cyborg cults ran by robots, gun-wielding babies with dead geriatrics' heads transplanted atop their uncoordinated bodies, a fast-food chain whose burger patties contain mind-controlling additives, a cabal of wealthy hedonists, blackmail, runaway teens, missing dames, and an endless array of shady characters (and

all of them lying out both sides of their mouth): it's all in a day's work for El Borbah, the heavy drinking, hard eating, perpetually smoking, two-fisted, rude-mouthed luchador turned private eye, and eponymous star of this early collection of serialized shorts from Charles Burns, the hands and mind who brought us the now classic horror story of teenage sex and alienation, *Black Hole*.

Andy says

El Borbah is a rude, obnoxious, selfish, and incredibly stupid masked wrestler detective. When he's not chain-smoking and strong-arming his clients for his advance fee, he's investigating missing persons that have either been converted into robots, had their adult heads grafted onto baby bodies or secretaries brainwashed into behaving like 4-year old infants. Burns is a very cool artist and El Borbah is a pisser, elbowing his oafish way through every case.

Bryan says

Charles Burns takes Roy Lichtenstein, blends him with early 80's downtown NY and puts them back into a surrealist glee-ride of a book. Not a masterpiece like *Black Hole* but chock full of signifiers both fun and profound. Can't even imagine how weird it must have been to read these tales in 1982.

Originally published as *Hard-Boiled Defective Stories*, I read a few of these stories while I was in high school and was turned off by the art edge. Didn't get it. Now I can't get enough.

Donald Armfield says

A detective in Andre the Giant attire and a Mexican mask takes on weird cases. The art once again is great but the dialogue and character theme reminds me of Strong Bad on the Wii Entertainment System. Although these comics came out before the Wii, still... Very interesting from Charles Burns.

Erik Erickson says

Fun stories that lampoon and celebrate the detective pulps. Along with that great heavy line weight and high contrast Charles Burns does so damn well. The extra large format is much appreciated (I can't stand how Pantheon shrunk down the pages of *Black Hole* for the collected hardback, what on earth were they thinking??).

Alfrediux says

Fantastic compilation of early detective stories by Charles Burns, the comics revolve around the bizarre adventures of El Borbah a giant private detective with a Mexican Luchador outfit and passion for cigarettes and smashing up criminals. The stories are filled with graphic references to old pulp detective mags, film-

noir, aliens, robots, evil secret brotherhoods and all kinds of sci-fi parafernalia, and like all Burns comics the pure black and white artwork is stunning. Definitely a must read.
