AND I, RENE TARDI, PRISONER OF WAR IN STALAG 11B

MEANWHILE

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PLUS... KUPER’S KAFKAESQUE

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“Have you ever seen such madness? Look at them all racing about in their machines! A real affront to the German sense of order. And think of that poor fellow up there, trying to make sense of it all.” That’s how writer Kurt Sevinger (top right) introduces artist Marthe Muller to Berlin, center of German life. The city’s raging traffic is a symbol of the furious changes shaking Berlin in its foundations, the struggling government the traffic cop isolated in his tower among yet above the melee. Sevinger plays City Mouse to Muller’s Country Mouse in Jason Lutes’ Berlin. A historical epic twopart in four acts, Berlin follows Sevinger and Muller as the Weimar Republic begins to collapse. By nature observers more than actors, Sevinger and Muller try to stay out of the way while the streets are filled with strife and violence. But each are inevitably drawn into the conflict. Country Mouse Muller actually does a better job of dealing with the bedlam than City Mouse Sevinger. She takes up with the capital’s artistic community, itself in an uproar as the aesthetic verities of the past are challenged by Modernist movements such as Expressionism and the “New Objectivity.” She begins an affair with another artist, Anno (bottom right), a cross-dresser who introduces Marthe to the underground gay culture of Berlin. Muller also carries on an affair with Sevinger, which he spurns as he falls apart. Her writer’s faith in words, in their power to change things for the better, fades. Like most moderates in a time of extremity, Sevinger stands lost and confused in the face of the Republic’s corruption and incompetence, of the fury of the Communists and the savagery of the Nazis, of the weakness of democratic ideals in a nation reared on authoritarianism. That weakness comes as no surprise to those like the schoolteacher (image right) who hold those ideals as fervently as the radicals who strive to undermine them. Such radicals include Otto, the Red organizer who talks Gudrun Braun into attending the demonstration where she’s shot by the police, leaving her daughter Rachel (image bottom right) and son Heinz to very different fates. And they include various members of the burgeoning Nazi movement, from the slim-dwelling, iron-fisted, gunsmen’s mentored by Gudrun’s embittered widower to Adolf Hitler himself. A bland little man who sees no reason to act, he listens to his favorite spokesman Goebbels discuss the Party’s path to power: “We schedule rallies...in predominately Communist neighborhoods. We provoke chaos. Then, we demonstrate order. The press eats it up.” As do too many Berliners, like the burger who says “We need someone to keep order around here” and the decadent aristocrat Margarethe von Falkensee, who throws her name and fortune behind the “Little Corporate” and his gang. And those are just a few of the myriad characters swept up in the rush of history, each with their own story. A graphic masterpiece with many levels, Berlin speaks not just to yesterday, but to today. Each night, we reported, and even adorneds, the distribution of bread. It was a free commodity, a vast, an extremely big deal. We jury-rigged a revolving scale, with two bow wares lots of the same kind. The beam was balanced on the Made of a bag of bread per family and bagged or carved prints. He perfectly captures Kafka’s perception of the medieval darkness that lies beneath the facade of modern life. Kuper uses scrapbook to create a look reminiscent of wood carvings. The classics illustrated include “The Burrow,” “The Hunger Artist,” and a scorching rendition of “In the Penal Colony.” Get Kafkaesque from Beaumont and Central.

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The issues of masculinity are the last thing troubling the citizens of Woman World (Drawn & Quarterly). All the men are gone. An ever-growing dearth of male births have left the world to women. This collection of the oft-shared Instagram comic by Aminder Dhillwal follows a group of women and girls trying to make a new society in the absence of men. But what sounds like a set-up for a grim and gritty Vertigo series is actually one of the funniest books of the year. The episodic story involves the central cast of Gaia, the always nude mayor of the community of Beyoncé's Thighs; the fractious couple Lara and Layla and their friend Ina, who carries a torch for Layla; Doctor, the new doctor from the Capital; Ulaana, the only woman old enough to remember men, and her granddaughter Emiko, who fixates on a copy of Paul Blart, Mall Cop as a totem of the mysterious 21st Century. There are other women, too, moving through the two-to-three page gags rendered in Dhillwal's loose, expressive style. Most of the book is monochrome, but there are some beautifully colored pages, especially the three-color introduction explaining the origins of Woman World. Find it at Central, Eastside and Tates Creek.

Meanwhile, another apocalypse happens to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, when a large chunk of the city—and the 300,000 people living in it—are enveloped by another dimension. It's a monster-ridden world called "Oblivion" by those hardy souls who have ventured into it and escaped. Foremost among them is Nathan Cole, who has made it his life's work to retrieve the lost from the other world...especially his brother Ed. But it turns out Ed and his companions in Oblivion aren't exactly champing at the bit to get back to the "real world", carnivorous flocks of giant gut-birds or no. The struggle within and without Oblivion is described in the first chapter of Oblivion Song, the latest Image series by The Walking Dead’s Robert Kirkman and hot Italian artist Lorenzo De Felici, available from Central, Eastside and Northside. Two exotic cities that actually existed on this Earth are the subjects of our final two graphic novels. In His Dream of the Skyland (Top Shelf) Anna Opotowsky captures the people’s struggle between tradition and modernity, while Aya Morton’s exquisite artwork mesmerizes with its balance of color and white space. Get it from Central. That location and Beaumont have the latest adventure of the classic European comics hero, Corto Maltese. Fable of Venice (EuroComics) finds Hugo Pratt’s globally beloved mercenary mixed up in pre-war plots involving hooded Freemasons, Italian blackshirts (based on the creator’s own cousins) and stand-ins for rabble-rouser Gabriele D’Annunzio and actress Louise Brooks. This edition of EuroComic’s popular series of reprints is rich with historical background, including fold-out maps of the city’s canals. Reserve your copy at lexpublib.org!

“Kurt was the Man. He knew all the forms, the brands, and the mystery lingo that maleness seemed to ask of us.” Or so it seems to Russell Pruitt, protagonist of Home After Dark (Liveright/W.W. Norton). Russell is abandoned by his adulterous mother and, in time, his alcoholic father. He in turn abandons the people who truly care for him while keeping company with Kurt and Willie, trying to find refuge in the shadow of tougher boys. Russell moves through life like a ghost, always an observer, never an actor. His alienation leads to an act of violence that forces Russell to face himself and take action. Set in the 1950s of Buddy Holly and Kukla, Fran & Ollie, Home After Dark is the latest from David Small, creator of the medical autobiography Stitches. Small’s spare, spectral line and masterful use of ink washes captures both the sun-swept emptiness of mid-century California and the gangly discomfort of adolescence. Home After Dark is a coming-of-age classic available from Beaumont, Central, Eastside and Tates Creek. Stitches is still available under B Sm187a1.