MEANWHILE

PLUS... BELL AND BRONTES

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Reading Is Just the Beginning

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PLUS... BELL AND BRONTES
One day, all the grown-ups die. A plague sweeps the earth clean of adults. Twenty years later, the now-grown children of that dead age of TVs and iphones and SUVs have re-established society, if not civilization. But as community leader Lindy says, “We’ve survived. That doesn’t mean we know what we’re doing.” Now her city is under siege by the zealot army of the New Church. But the key to a better future might lie with a little girl on the lam named Princess. Now hundreds may die for the sake of one child.

Ted Anderson’s eerily relevant tale of tomorrow, Orphan Age (AfterShock) is brought to life by the eye-pleasing art and masterful coloring of Nuno Plati and João Lemos.

A gang of funnybook archetypes—the space hero, the street-level bruise, the alien avenger, the spooky chick—are stranded on the Farm. Their past a mystery, their present a prison, the only hope for rescue is a young black woman. She is the heir to the mission of one of the greatest heroes of Spiral City, Black Hammer.

That’s also the name of the offbeat superhero series written by superstar scibe and scribbler Jeff Lemire. Meanwhile, a spin-off set during a robot- and raygun-wrecked World War Two foregrounds the racial subtext of the series. The rough-hewn Black Hammer ‘45 imagines that the Blackhawks, best-selling sky jockeys from the Golden Age of Comics, were actually black.

Conan, Aragorn and Harry Potter, LOOK OUT! A new generation of African-American creators bring the noise in an eruption of black-centered comics dealing with urban sorcery, post-apocalyptic struggle, cyberpunk spycraft and senses-shattering superhero sagas. Go to lexpublib.org to reserve these new classics of science fiction and fantasy.

A young black woman is found dead at the base of the HOLLYWOOD sign. In the face of official indifference, her uncle, a shady psychic known as the “Conjure-Man,” takes up the investigation. Her past is yet another sordid story of racial and sexual exploitation. But behind the human monsters are the supernatural kind. The Conjure-Man is calling on the Reaper of Vengeance to aid his crusade. The newest volume in the popular Pretty Deadly series, The Rat is a dream-like read thanks to the hallucinatory art of Emma Rios and Jordie Bellaire.

That ol’ black magic is beautiful indeed in the urban fantasy series Excellence from Image and Robert Kirkman’s SkyBound combine. Spencer Dales is the reluctant hero destined to follow his father into the secret society of mystics known as the Aegis. The rebellious Spencer has plans to change a system which he sees as sclerotic and self-serving. But his father’s protégé has something to say about that, and the sorcerous throw-down begins. An exclusive crew of creators of color puts the black in magician with Kill the Past. Popular cartoonist Khary Randolph brings to life a wild world both real and fantastic with his dynamic layouts and humane characterization.
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and concerns uncivilized things. Bedbugs, the Big Bad Wolf, bears, a constantly naked neighbor, more bears, and a totally inappropriate physician go through their manic motions rendered in Bell’s homely, scratchy style. Not all the stories are about uncomfortable things; in fact, “The Nicest Dog” is so sweet and sad I’m teary up just thinking about it. Inappropriate is available at all LPL locations. Even scratchier than Gabrielle Bell is Isabel Greenberg and her new book, Glass Town (Abrams Comic Arts). Greenberg follows up her critically acclaimed Encyclopedia of Early Earth (still available from Central) with a fanciful biography of the Bronte family. Her style, a charmingly child-like mix of sketchy figures, scrawling lines and inky smudges, captures the raw enthusiasm of youthful creativity that is the heart of the novel. Stranded by circumstances in their sprawling manse at the boundary of the endless moors, Charlotte, Emily, Anne and the lone Bronte boy Branwell spin increasingly complicated tales of their imaginary Glass Town. “Places and plotlines were abandoned as soon as they appeared,” says the narrator. “New ones emerged...faster than you could dip a pen into ink.” Himself a character, Charles Wellesley retells, among other stories, the saga of the love/hate triangle involving his villainous brother Zamorna, their adoptive sibling Quashia Quamina, rightful king of the oppressed Ashante, and the brilliant Lady Zenobia. “The ruins of abandoned stories are quite interesting things to explore,” says Charles, and Greenberg proves it with Glass Town. Meanwhile, prolific avant garde cartoonist Michael DeForge has a new novel out from Drawn & Quarterly, a wild and wooly rumination on the ever-escalating rate of social change wrought by the Internet. In Familiar Face, reality itself, the world of streets and buildings and jobs and lovers, is constantly updated—or “upgraded”, to use the vernacular of Doctor Who’s malevolent Cybermen. Why, and by who, no one really knows. “The hallway you were walking in would come to an abrupt end. A door that previously led to a public washroom would suddenly open to a swimming pool, or tapas restaurant, or your parents’ bedroom.” The first person narration follows the protagonist as she tries to adapt physically and psychically to unceasing change. A love story underlies the madness, one tied to a cabal of rebel cartographers who have seized the means of “optimization”. Between the heroine’s colorful pages are black-n-white excerpts from the “complaint department”, each a different person caught up in the maelstrom of updates and downgrades. DeForge’s art is way more lucid than usual, his layouts simple and stark to best show off his squiggly style that looks like Miro and Tanguy jamming with Prohias and Peter Max. A background in architecture is what made the art of Marshall Rogers stand out in the crowded spinners of the 1970s. Along with other young guns like Walt Simonson and Howard Chaykin, Rogers brought to mainstream comics a new emphasis on design, of both the page and the drawing of figures, backgrounds, even sound effects. He was therefore an odd choice to handle the art for the return of Jack Kirby’s Mister Miracle. A new collection available from Central, Eastside and Northside shows how these stories written by ex-Marvelmaniacs Englehart and Gerber were the bridge between the brawny age of Kirby and the slick, angular approach that dominated the Eighties.