

The Ride Together

The *Ride Together* is the most curious of all the graphic novels released in 2003. A skillful and well-told autobiographical novel about a family living with an autistic sibling, the book is presented in both comics and prose form, with its two authors, Paul and Judy Karasik, taking turns telling the story of life with brother David in their preferred storytelling form.

This book could easily have failed in its aim of presenting a cohesive story. Others have certainly made the attempt to much less satisfying results. Dave Sim's *Jaka's Story* suffers from the florid density of the prose sections inserted into his otherwise almost-cinematic novel, which even the author acknowledges serves as a damper to much of his readership's first pass through the book. By contrast, the comics found in Phoebe Gloeckner's *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* seem almost like an afterthought — while her prose is an almost bravura display of narrative, the short comics sections interspersed within could easily have been replaced with more prose without the work suffering in the slightest. Each author's work is in its own way an excellent novel, yet in neither do both forms of communication gel into a vital and mutually supportive whole.

The Ride Together neatly sidesteps this problem thanks to its collaborative nature. While both Paul and Judy grew up in the same household and shared many of the same experiences, each brings a unique perspective to the work, which helps differentiate their dueling remembrances and allows a sort of triangulation to provide what seems, from an outsider's viewpoint, like a richer and more complete picture of the object of their efforts: David Karasik.

Each author brings a substantial resumé to the table. Judy is an accomplished book editor as well as a writer with substantial credentials. Paul served as an associate editor on the fabled New York-based comics anthology *RAW*, and was one of the collaborators behind the successful comics adaptation of Paul Auster's novel *City of Glass*.

Of the two, Judy seems more fully

integrated into David's world, sharing in-jokes and a common language with a man whose difficulties in processing sensory experiences made his life a never-ending struggle to maintain his connection to the outside world. One chapter, in which she takes David on an interstate road trip, offers a particularly intimate glimpse at the rich relationship between brother and sister.

In a way, the comics sections do the heavy lifting by providing thoughtful and potent metaphors for how autism affects a victim's ability to perceive and communicate. Nimbly mixing fantasy and reality, Paul dramatizes David's need to re-enact television programs by depicting him actually stepping into the television set; explains his brother's fixation with Superman TV villain Gorilla Watson by having Watson hijack the narrative and inviting the reader into David's head for a guided tour; shows words and symbols rearranging themselves into random patterns that David, as a child, must then decipher; and, in one memorable sequence, depicts the attendance of a Three Stooges film festival from his brother's point of view by removing the boundary between film and audience altogether, ending in a pie-fight among the theater patrons that we understand isn't real to anyone besides David.

The result is a rich, compelling portrait of a family, focusing on the element that makes the Karasiks unique yet placing them in an everyday context. We grow up with Paul and Judy, watch them learn to comprehend and accept their brother. When they grow up and learn to juggle their adult lives with the added responsibility of caring for David, we feel like we've grown up right along with them. Most of all, we come to feel as though we've gained some insight into what makes David Karasik tick.

I realize that calling *The Ride Together* one of 2003's best books of comics is not an easy

sell; the prose certainly carries more than its share of the narrative burden, and the reader can be forgiven for perhaps feeling that the

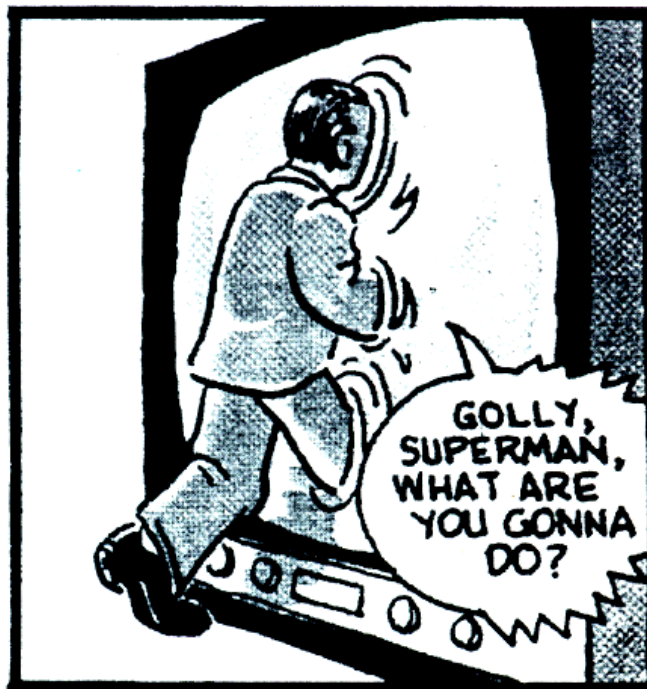
Journal has selected what amounts to an "assisted graphic novel." Nonetheless, this volume certainly fits the description of a graphic novel in all the ways that matter. Words and pictures combine and play off of one another, providing a coherent whole that would not have been possible in prose alone. *The Ride Together* presents its subject matter from a dizzying number of angles, taking full advantage not only of the strengths and possibilities of each medium, but also the synchronicity available by the union of both. The result is not only a satisfying and enriching experience for the reader, but a genuine advancement for the perceived possibilities inherent in the comics medium as well. There were any number of books produced in 2003 that attempted to re-imagine the nature of the graphic novel for narrative effect; few were as successful or as thought-provoking as *The Ride Together*. ●

— Dirk Deppey

Paul and Judy Karasik

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Below: Paul Karasik's clever depiction of one of his brother David's television re-enactments, from *The Ride Together*.



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