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# It Was the War of the Trenches

By Jacques Tardi



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It Was the War of the Trenches By Jacques Tardi

## Tardi's World War I masterpiece finally in English!

World War I, that awful, gaping wound in the history of Europe, has long been an obsession of Jacques Tardi's. (His very first?rejected?comics story dealt with the subject, as does his most recent work, the two-volume *Putain de Guerre*.) But *It Was the War of the Trenches* is Tardi's defining, masterful statement on the subject, a graphic novel that can stand shoulder to shoulder with Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*.

Tardi is not interested in the national politics, the strategies, or the battles. Like Remarque, he focuses on the day to day of the grunts in the trenches, and, with icy, controlled fury and disgust, with sardonic yet deeply sympathetic narration, he brings that existence alive as no one has before or since. Yet he also delves deeply into the underlying causes of the war, the madness, the cynical political exploitation of patriotism. And in a final, heartbreaking coda, Tardi grimly itemizes the ghastly human cost of the war, and lays out the future 20th century conflicts, all of which seem to spring from this global burst of insanity.

*Trenches* features some of Tardi's most stunning artwork. Rendered in an inhabitually lush illustrative style, inspired both by abundant photographic documentation and classic American war comics, augmented by a sophisticated, gorgeous use of Craftint tones, trenches is somehow simultaneously atypical and a perfect encapsulation of Tardi's mature style. It is the indisputable centerpiece of Tardi's *oeuvre*.

*It Was the War of the Trenches* has been an object of fascination for North American publishers: RAW published a chapter in the early 1980s, and *Drawn and Quarterly* magazine serialized a few more in the 1990s. But only a small fraction of *Trenches* has ever been made available to the English speaking public (in now out of print publications); the Fantagraphics edition, the third in an ongoing collection of the works of this great master, finally remedies this situation. 120 pages of black-and-white comics



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### It Was the War of the Trenches By Jacques Tardi Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Redressing a sad literary situation—the prior unavailability of this full masterpiece in English—Fantagraphics finally brings Tardi's wrenching tales of trench warfare during WWI to American audiences. Tardi, whose French grandfather would often recount his experiences on the front lines, has tackled the subject several times over the decades, and this unrelentingly bleak collection of vignettes represents the artistic culmination of his obsession. Portions of this collection were first published in Art Spiegelman's groundbreaking *RAW* comics anthology in the early 1980s, and Tardi didn't complete the work until nearly a decade later. Yet neither the long gestation period nor the lack of a central narrative prevents it from standing as a singular, cohesive work of art. From the living hell of combat to the ghostlike calm of bombed-out villages, each panel radiates with the fear and hopelessness of hapless conscripts who strive only to retain their limbs and their sanity. Calling the war a gigantic, anonymous scream of agony, Tardi skewers the concept of nationalism and drives home the banality of death. Dark, densely packed backgrounds and heavy wedges of solid black recall the dramatic shading effects of European expressionism, as do the characters' black, fearful eyes. Nearly a century after the fact, Tardi's outrage and compassion make the First World War sting like a fresh wound. (Apr.)

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## Review

“Starred Review. While the visuals, which draw upon battlefield photographs, are thoroughly convincing, the soldiers’ harrowing experiences, fictionalized by Tardi, register as even more powerfully authentic. The potency of the soldiers’ tragic stories is enhanced by the elegance of Tardi’s lucid drawing and keen compositions that are accentuated by the use of three horizontal panels per page throughout. This masterful condemnation of the cruelty and stupidity of war, created over the course of a decade, from 1982 to 1993, is a *cri de coeur* that stands out even amid Tardi’s impressive body of work.” (Booklist)

“Tardi’s tales from World War I capture the morbid drudgery that is trench warfare and finds pockets of profundity that speak to the nature of war and man. His stark, inky forms perfectly convey the blackened skies, scorched landscape, and gritty reality faced by thousands of soldiers.” (Matt White - Publishers Weekly)

“Tardi’s aesthetic is tailor made for this kind of violence, and his inky impressionism carries chilling tactility without peer. There are, simply put, few people who can render bodies with as much physical weight as the deceptively-cartoonish Tardi, and there are few stories worthy of applying that skill as this one.” (Shea Hennum - Paste)

“Ink-soaked and gory, Tardi’s detailed renderings drive home the grotesquery of the war and the ordeal of the young men fighting in it. ...*It Was the War of the Trenches* creates an aura of loss, regret and terror.” (Michael C. Lorah - Newsarama)

“This extraordinary collection of World War I tales offers perhaps the finest work from the lauded Tardi. ... Visceral, powerful, and effective, the flawless *It Was The War of the Trenches* blazes a new standard for the war comic.” (Rick Klaw - The SF Site: Nexus Graphica)

“It’s a hugely powerful work, both moving and horrific and filled with anger for the suffering and injustices one group of ‘civilized’ humans can visit upon another... [W]orks like this are needed to remind us of the

monstrous acts we can be capable of.” (Joe Gordon - The Forbidden Planet International Blog Log)

“Many books have been written about World War I, but few can truly worm their way into your head like Jacques Tardi’s *It Was the War of the Trenches*. ... The tales here are devastating and heartbreaking, and often disturbing, but readers will nonetheless have a hard time putting it down.” (Holly Scudero - Sacramento Book Review)

“In terms of its writing and its art, *Trenches* is a masterful work. ... But the book’s true victory is a moral one. For it shows us, clearly and terribly, the thorough destruction of values inherent in modern war.” (Kristian Williams - The Comics Journal)

“Tardi’s depiction of the First World War is so impassioned and visceral that it can be compared to the work of the artists who actually served in the trenches.” (Joe Sacco, author of *Palestine*)

“Tardi is bringing very specific and very effective weapons to bear in his chillingly successful effort to convey [the] particular horror [of World War I].” (Sean T. Collins - Attentiondeficitdisorderly)

#### About the Author

Jacques Tardi is a pioneering European cartoonist. His Adele Blanc-Sec series was adapted into a feature by Luc Besson, and he was behind the recent animated film *April and the Extraordinary World*. His comics are award winning (including the U.S.’s Eisners). He lives in Paris with his wife, the singer Dominique Grange, and their cats.

## Users Review

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#### Billy Reynolds:

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