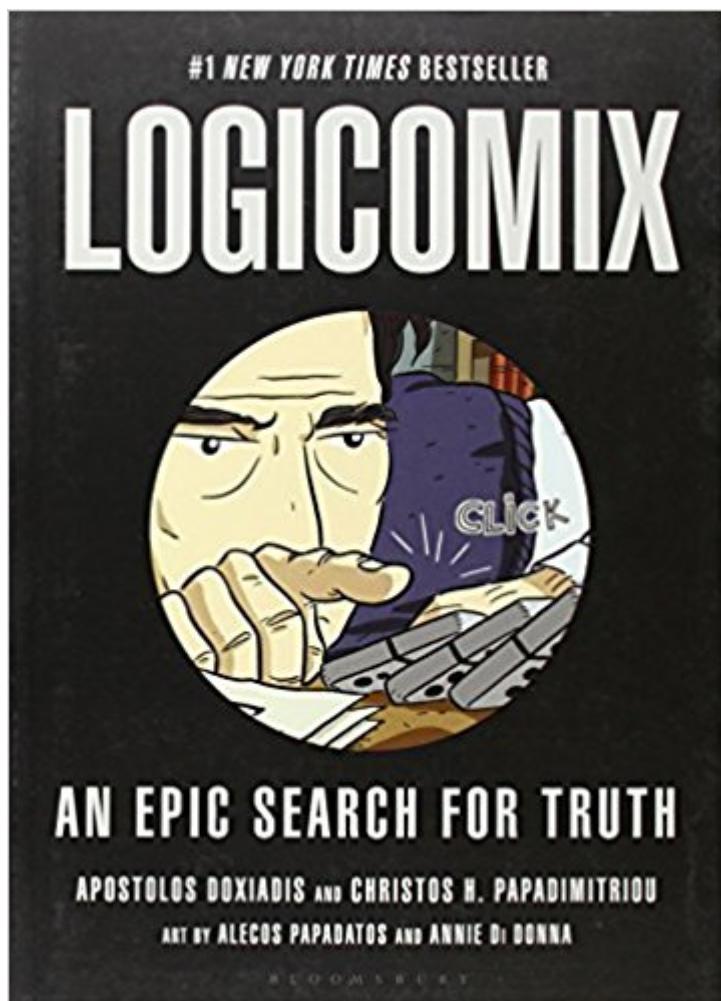


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Logicomix: An Epic Search For Truth



Synopsis

This exceptional graphic novel recounts the spiritual odyssey of philosopher Bertrand Russell. In his agonized search for absolute truth, Russell crosses paths with legendary thinkers like Gottlob Frege, David Hilbert, and Kurt Gödel, and finds a passionate student in the great Ludwig Wittgenstein. But his most ambitious goal--to establish unshakable logical foundations of mathematics--continues to loom before him. Through love and hate, peace and war, Russell persists in the dogged mission that threatens to claim both his career and his personal happiness, finally driving him to the brink of insanity. This story is at the same time a historical novel and an accessible explication of some of the biggest ideas of mathematics and modern philosophy. With rich characterizations and expressive, atmospheric artwork, the book spins the pursuit of these ideas into a highly satisfying tale. Probing and ingeniously layered, the book throws light on Russell's inner struggles while setting them in the context of the timeless questions he spent his life trying to answer. At its heart, *Logicomix* is a story about the conflict between an ideal rationality and the unchanging, flawed fabric of reality.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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of mathematics--continues to loom before him. Through love and hate, peace and war, Russell persists in the dogged mission that threatens to claim both his career and his personal happiness, finally driving him to the brink of insanity. Take a Look InsideThe creators of Logicomix introduce us to Bertrand Russell in 1939 during one of his public lectures. Russell explores the question, "What is logic?" by telling the story of "one of [logic's] most ardent fans"--himself. The panels that follow (click each image to see the full page) reimagine the life of a brilliant young man with a passion for mathematics.

Starred Review. An ambitious full-color exploration of the life and ideas of philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell, the book meticulously interconnects Russell's life, the timelessness of his ideas and the process of creating the book. While a comic about the quest for the foundations of mathematics may seem arduous, it is engrossing on many levels; the story moves, despite heavy philosophical and technical information, as the images, dialogue and narration play off each other. Russell's story is framed within a speech he gave on the brink of America's entry into WWII, in which he expounds his life and philosophical journey. Russell's story is also framed by the creators working in Greece, as they discuss and mold his life into a narrative structure. One of the most prominent themes is the conflict and symbiosis between madness and logic. The fear of madness haunts Russell because of childhood trauma, as he neurotically pushes himself toward what he conceives of as its opposite, a system for certainty. Inventive, with both subtle and overt narrative techniques, the comic form organizes the complex ideas into a simpler system, combining to form a smart and engaging journey through the ambiguity of truth. (Sept.)

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In this book, we see some of the personality and characteristics, chiefly of Bertrand Russell, but also of other people involved with the efforts to establish a connection between logic and the language, or perhaps, game, of mathematics. This develops a significant picture of people who saw the possibility of making small incremental adjustments via logic to establish significant aspects of mathematics. This, however, was not the world that was unfolding before their efforts. Instead, as with Russell's paradox, small incremental changes were shown sometimes to lead to large, unpredictable changes in meaning. The book tries to capture this by suggesting a proximity of these intellectual activities to madness and the chaos of war. While Russell never crossed the fine line into the distress that nonlinearity can bring with it, some of the people he was pictured to associate with did cross the line, such as Wittgenstein, who actually participated as a soldier in WWI. I liked the

book. It gave a flavor for this subtle boundary between civilization and madness. It also suggested that those such as Russell in pursuit of truth at a deep level were coming very close to that line. The people who worked on the book were also depicted. Their task was not this deep philosophical pursuit: They lived their lives calmly remotely from the borderlands. This is an extremely good book for giving an indication of what it means to get close to madness or the chaos of war, and how those far from it can feel insulated, pursuing their mundane purposes on the surface of life. I recommend this book for obtaining a view of the limits of our humanity in pursuit of the truth, but not for any deep philosophical or mathematical insights.

Bertrand Russell and *Principia Mathematica* wouldn't be at the top of my list as candidates for graphic novels, but this is good, even provocative. You can quarrel with details of the depictions of personalities, theories, and proofs, but it's still as good a mix of entertainment and intellectual history as you could really hope for. The story elevates Russell's (and Whitehead's) quest for a logical foundation to mathematics to the central tension of both Russell's life and the history of philosophy in the first half of the twentieth century. For Russell, it's a search for certainty in a life threatened by madness. For philosophy, it's a turning point not only in the philosophy of mathematics, but in the understanding of the relationship between reason and reality. And it is the link, via Von Neumann and Turing, between logic and the foundations of modern computing. Virtually all of those themes are debatable -- in what sense Russell and Whitehead were seeking a "foundation" (e.g., an explanation vs. a justification), what role the successes and failures of *Principia Mathematica* played in the changing status of rationalism, and what debt computing theory owes specifically to the work of Russell and Whitehead and the controversies arising from it. The story places Russell firmly at the center, even putting him on a kind of odyssey, visiting and conversing in person with virtually all the major figures in mathematics and philosophy of the time. The authors clearly present the work as at least partly fictional, inventing meetings for example between Russell and Frege and between Russell and Cantor, none of which ever happened. And Russell's story is told via an imagined lecture by Russell, attended in part by anti-war (World War II) protesters Russell has encountered on his way into the lecture. The entire story is framed by conversations among the authors, about Russell, *Principia*, and the story itself, lending a kind of post-modern effect to the whole thing. If there's a flaw I would pick on, it wouldn't be the details of the biographies, theories, or proofs. This is a graphic novel, after all -- if you want academic precision, you should have gone in a different direction. On the other hand, I didn't find a lot of drama in Russell's message to the protesters. I think I get it -- "There's no royal road to truth", as he

says, and you can't expect so much of "the role of logic in human affairs". You can't fall back on the dictates of certainty -- in the end, there is no escaping the responsibility to make judgements -- a profound recognition for sure, but the punch in its depiction here is lacking for me.

Review of the paperback editions: Logicomix: An Epic Search for Truth Paperback by Apostolos Doxiadis and Christos Papadimitriou

Bottom Line

An Epic Search for the Truth is a legitimate and ambitious effort to teach and entertain. The story line is based on a supposed autobiographic lecture by the mid-20th Century Philosopher and Mathematician Lord Bertrand Russell and a parallel story told by the authors and some of the writers and staff at Logicomix. Between the two the reader is exposed to an effort to go beyond the mathematical axioms we were taught, and told to just accept. The people in this book, and they are all historical, were working to find an absolute logical bases for all of math. One that removes any unproven or un-provable assumption. My recommendation is that these folks attempt more than they can deliver. Space is given to personal dramatics and entertainment and the topic is obtuse as to resist this degree of simplification. This is a worthy effort and a promises a better graphic book series I will return to for other topics, but An Epic Search for Truth was a disappointment.:-(

Were the choice available this would be a 3.5 star review. Good artwork and far more depth than any other graphic book I have so far read. The term graphic novel is inaccurate given how much of the material is historically and logically correct. I cannot round it up because in glossing over real depth or meaningful analysis the discussion tends to read as extended teasing rather than informing. The authors deserve credit for attempting to include sufficient personal information about a large number of the leading thinkers with whom Lord Russell would have studied, with whom he interacted, or who would follow some aspect of his early research. Also well done are a series of brief biographical sketches for each of these people at the end of the book.

An Epic Search is an intelligent effort to render comprehensible a search for ultimate truth. For many of those named, this search either caused them to go mad, or was an expression of personalities so intense as to mimic madness. Those who escaped the worst of these symptoms suffered tragedies based on the event of two World Wars or vagaries of European politics. There are few happy endings.

Despite the weaknesses of this book, I will return for more from the studios of Logicomix. This book is not a failure and promises that the same folks can do better.

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