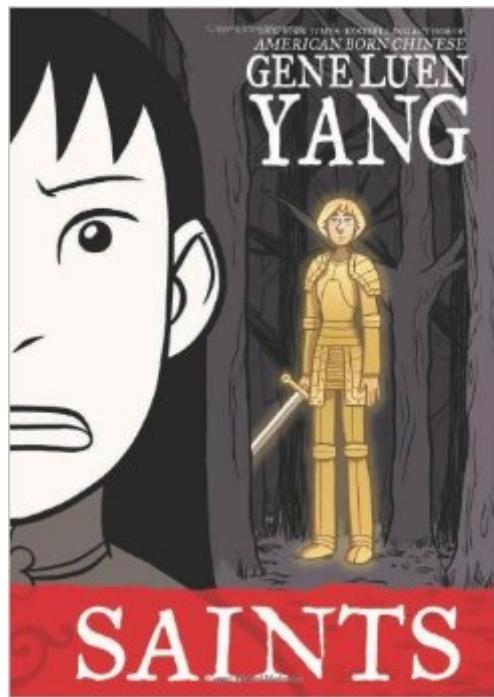


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Saints (Boxers & Saints)



Synopsis

Gene Luen Yang is the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature. A New York Times bestsellerChina, 1898. An unwanted fourth daughter, Four-Girl isn't even given a proper name by her family. She finds friendship-and a name, Vibiana-in the most unlikely of places: Christianity. But China is a dangerous place for Christians. The Boxer Rebellion is murdering Westerners and Chinese Christians alike. Torn between her nation and her Christian friends, Vibiana will have to decide where her true loyalties lie . . . and whether she is willing to die for her faith. ---Boxers & Saints is a groundbreaking graphic novel in two volumes. This innovative format presents two parallel tales about young people caught up on opposite sides of a violent rift. Saints tells Vibiana's story, and the companion volume, Boxers, tells the story of Little Bao, a young man who joins the Boxer Rebellion. American Born Chinese author Gene Luen Yang brings his trademark magical realism to the complexities of the Boxer Rebellion, and lays bare the universal foundations of extremism, rebellion, and faith.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (40 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #302,283 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #39 inÂ Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > Asia #185 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Religious Fiction > Other Religious Fiction #254 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Explore the World > Asia

Age Range: 12 - 18 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

[Edited to add: Please note that this is a review of Boxers. seems to have posted all reviews for Boxers both to the review page for Boxers and to the review page for Saints. And vice versa. has

been making a number of blunders like that of late and politely worded emails asking it to fix the problem go unanswered. That makes more work for readers who need to sort out whether they are actually reading the right reviews.] "What is China but a people and their stories?" That question, posed late in *Boxers*, is fundamental to graphic novels that retell legends of the country's past. This one is written in the style of a legend but recounts (in a fanciful way) an event -- the Boxer Rebellion -- that is really too recent to be legendary. *Boxers* takes place in late nineteenth century China. Priests and foreign armies are disrupting village life with their arrogant, sacrilegious ways. Little Bao, who views his father as an heroic figure from the operas he adores, is dismayed when his father, on his way to seek justice from the magistrate, is beaten by foreigners. One day a man named Red Lantern comes to the village. He teaches young men kung fu and heals the disabled. Red Lantern seeks recruits to help him defend villages from the foreign devils. Little Bao isn't allowed to join them, but he takes Red Lantern's place as the student of a kung fu master and learns how to channel the gods -- a handy talent in a fight, particularly if you channel the god of war (although the Repentant Pig Demon is pretty badass too). Soon Bao is leading the Big Sword Society, following in Red Lantern's heroic footsteps. After a name change for the sake of coolness (although what male wouldn't want to be a member of the Big Sword Society?)

Back in grad school, I had my first experience with Gene Luen Yang's work when we read his most famous graphic novel thus far, *American Born Chinese*. Though disparate in subject matter, *Boxers* does have something in common with his prior work, the magical realism that Yang brings to bear even on historical or contemporary subjects. In *Boxers*, Gene Luen Yang manages to pack quite a punch with his spare prose and straight forward drawings. Though I learned about the Boxer Rebellion in college, I'll admit that my memories thereof are limited at best. Based on extensive research (okay, I checked Wikipedia), Yang actually fits in the main historical points without being at all tedious or lecturing. Basically, Yang has perfected the ability to teach without seeming like he's teaching, which is ideal for the intended audience. He conveys the difficult times that led to the rebellion, the drought and the negative impact foreigners were having in China, through the lens of the life of one young boy who grows up to lead the rebellion. Little Bao did not start out as a remarkable boy. He lived in the shadow of his older brothers and had his head in the clouds, fancifully imagining himself the character in an opera. With Little Bao's optimism, to some degree never shed throughout his journey, Yang captures the wholehearted belief the Boxers had that they would be victorious. In no way did they imagine that their gods would let them lose or that foreigners could truly take over China. Remember how I mentioned the fantasy angle? Well, in

Boxers, the beliefs in local gods, the beliefs being challenged by the conversion to Christianity coming with the influx of foreigners, are manifested physically. Yang literally pits the old gods versus the imperialist forces.

Saints is a companion graphic novel to Boxers, which takes on the opposite perspective: that of a secondary devil. This terminology may not be familiar to you, so allow me to explain. A secondary devil is a Chinese person who has converted to Christianity, thus aligning themselves with the foreign devils. Saints covers the same time period, but has only one moment with the same scene happening, though it does offer further insight into the events of Boxers just the same. Though they're companions, I do think reading them in this order does work slightly better. In Boxers & Saints, what Yang really digs into are people's motivations. How does an unassuming Chinese boy grow up to kill his countrymen as a Boxer? Why would a young girl convert to Christianity, rather than sticking to the gods of her country? Yang doesn't set out to teach the reader exactly what happened; there aren't any specific dates or anything like that. Instead, he shows the feelings and the ways of thinking that led to the bloody battles and the hatred. Boxers & Saints are nuanced, subtle and thought-provoking. The main character of Saints made a brief appearance in Boxers, as the girl young Little Bao wanted to marry when he grew up because her face resembled an opera mask. Four-girl, so called because she was the fourth child to the family and believed to be a devil and to represent death, has no true name and is not beloved of her family. She tries to get them to accept her, but all they see is how she falls short. As a child might, she begins to act out for attention, by making a devil face. Her mother, sick of the comments from others about Four-girl's devil face, takes her to a Doctor, who happens to be a Christian, and he convinces her to stop with the devil face.

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