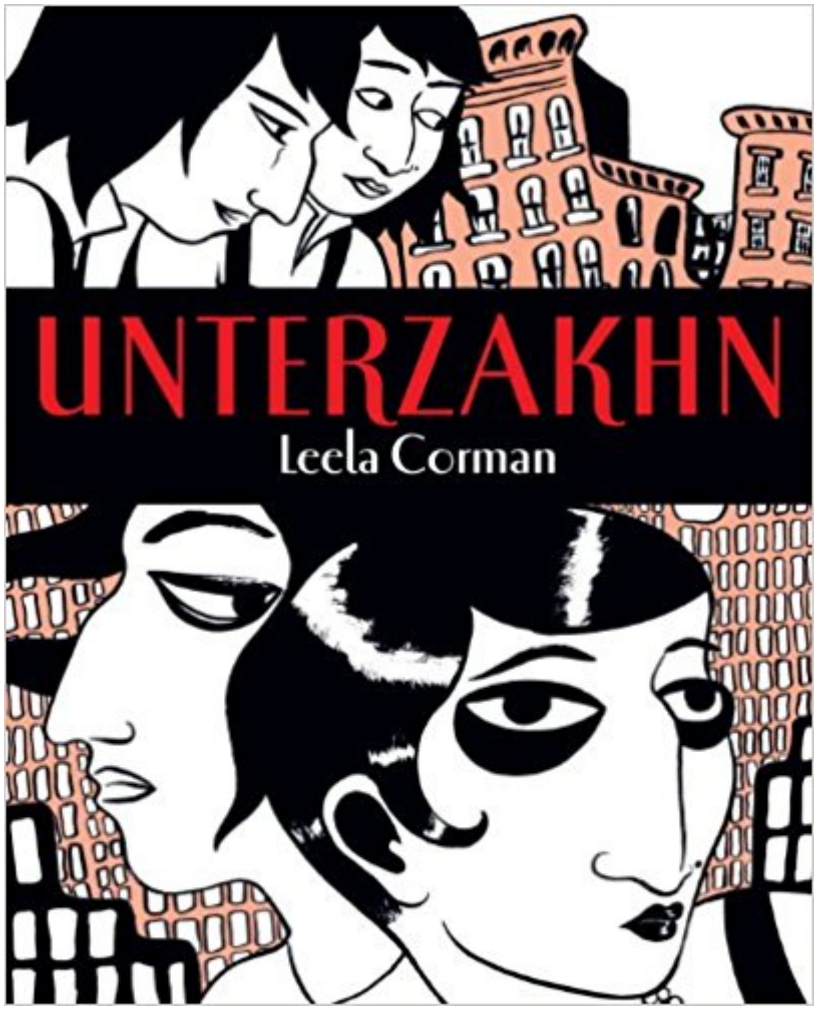
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Unterzakhn (Pantheon Graphic Novels)



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Synopsis

A mesmerizing, heartbreaking graphic novel of immigrant life on New YorkÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Lower East Side at the turn of the twentieth century, as seen through the eyes of twin sisters whose lives take radically and tragically different paths.Ã Â For six-year-old Esther and Fanya, the teeming streets of New YorkÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Lower East Side circa 1910 are both a fascinating playground and a place where lifeÃ¢â ¬â„¢s lessons are learned quickly and often cruelly. In drawings that capture both the tumult and the telling details of that street life, Unterzakhn (Yiddish for Ã¢â ¬Å“UnderthingsÃ¢â ¬Â•) tells the story of these sisters: as wide-eyed little girls absorbing the sights and sounds of a neighborhood of struggling immigrants; as teenagers taking their own tentative steps into the wider world (Esther working for a woman who runs both a burlesque theater and a whorehouse, Fanya for an obstetrician who also performs illegal abortions); and, finally, as adults battling for their own piece of the Ã¢â ¬Å“golden land,Ã¢â ¬Â• where the difference between just barely surviving and triumphantly succeeding involves, for each of them, painful decisions that will have unavoidably tragic repercussions.

Book Information

Series: Pantheon Graphic Novels

Hardcover: 208 pages

Publisher: Schocken; First Edition, First Printing edition (April 3, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0805242597

ISBN-13: 978-0805242591

Product Dimensions: 7.6 x 0.8 x 9.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.5 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 27 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #183,245 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #74 inÃ Â Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Graphic Novels > Contemporary Women #141 inÃ Â Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Graphic Novels > Historical & Biographical Fiction #234 inÃ Â Books > Literature & Fiction > Women's Fiction > Sisters

Customer Reviews

Featured Pages from Unterzakhn (Click on images to enlarge) Ã Â Ã Â

Ã¢â ¬Å“[A] touching look at twins who take distinctly different roads in life, but can't prevent their

paths from intersecting . . .Ã Â CormanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s style, inspired by Russian folk art, has a crudeness that highlights the gritty urban environment, but the fluid line-work of her characters adds a touch of delicacy and grace to the proceedings.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •NPR.orgÃ Â Ã¢â ¬Å“A haunting and often heartbreaking look at Eastern European Jewish immigrants in the early 20th century, Unterzakhn is also a story about women, power, and bodies; entirely too much of it rings entirely too contemporary . . . Corman blends an almost wobbly, liquid style with a real sense of period detail and a flair for the grotesque. She also knows what comics can do well, and one of those things is move forward and backward in time, giving a 200-page narrative the feel of a tightly told epic.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Austin American-StatesmanÃ¢â ¬Å“CormanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s attention to period detail and the quirks of Yiddish bring this book to vivid life . . . While she allows for a lot of moral ambiguity in the conventional sense, there seems to be no question which characters are the most humane. The complex route she takes to guide the reader to arrive at these conclusions, the level of detail she includes, and the feelings that the journey evinces are what make this a successful work. [Unterzakhn is] a celebration of human kindness in the face of the abyss . . .Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The Comics JournalÃ Â Ã¢â ¬Å“CormanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s writing and artwork make for a very energetic combination. Her brushwork is as bold as her sharp narrative. Her vision works well with expressing womenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s issues, the Jewish struggle, tenement life, and the dreams of her characters, whether thwarted or painfully realized . . . [A] sumptuous graphic novel.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Comics GrinderÃ¢â ¬Å“Here is what is magisterial aboutÃ Â Unterzakhn: it arrives with the force of artistic conviction, the unholy love child of Love and Rockets and Isaac Bashevis Singer . . . It is a credit to Corman that you will not forget the outcome of these girlsÃ¢â ¬â„¢ livesÃ¢â ¬â •a story simple and fabulistic, as in the best of Singer, with dark overtones that come from faithless characters in whom we can trust.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Edie Meidav, The MillionsÃ¢â ¬Å“Subtly feminist and thoroughly fascinating.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Sacramento News & ReviewÃ¢â ¬Å“CormanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s comic is filled with colorful characters, each lovingly, dramatically rendered in a loose, abstracted style of exaggerated design that belies the complexity of the fully-realized sets and setting they move through. These include not only the sisters, their mother and father, the women who shaped them, and the men who flit in and out of their lives, but even the minor players, the people crowding the backgrounds of street scenes. Viewed as either a story or as art, itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s an exceptional piece of work. Viewed as story as art, itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s a tour-de-force.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Robot6Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Lures you in with wittiness and sensuality . . . then bites you in the tuchus!Ã Â Unterzakhn swirls with the energy of AlmodÃƒÂ var and the depth of Dostoyevsky as it follows the fates of two charmingly complicated twin sisters.Ã Â I loved

it.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Craig Thompson, author of HabibiÃ Â Ã¢â ¬Å“An incredible book about twin sisters growing up on New YorkÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Lower East Side in the early twentieth century. ItÃ¢â ¬â„¢s about the experience and struggles of women, the immigrant experience, and itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s just brimming with life. . . .

Wow.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •ComicBookResources.comÃ Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Unterzakhn works on multiple levels (one notable one: the art work is fantastic, particularly when Corman infuses any of her female characters with a snarl or a sneer, conveying a lifetime of pent-up emotion in a single panel), and as such, itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s highly recommended.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •GraphicNovelReporter.comÃ Â Ã¢â ¬Å“CormanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s caricatures are striking and distinctive, making the exaggerated characters come alive, and she provides a great, detailed view of the times. . . . She does an excellent job of dropping the reader into this particular time and place. Although a period piece, the underlying concerns, especially those related to a womanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s control of her own body, remain particularly timely.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •ComicsWorthReading.comÃ Â Ã¢â ¬Å“In the footsteps of Art Spiegelman comes Leela Corman.Ã Â Like the renowned creator of Maus, she employs the graphic novel form, but rather than address the Holocaust she is addressing the Jewish immigrant experience on the Lower East Side in the early twentieth century.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The Jewish Week (New York)Ã¢â ¬Å“Corman produces an exceptional portrayal, deserving of much laudatory praise and acclaim, of immigrant and Jewish life on par with the works of Will Eisner and Art Spiegelman.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •SFSite.comÃ Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Corman has an ear for dialogue and a loose, curvilinear brush-line that makes reading her work a pleasure.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The Boston PhoenixÃ Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Captivating. . . . A sweetly sad story, illustrating the difficulty of life in the early twentieth century as seen through the eye of a specific subculture. . . . Corman never shies away from harshness in either her story or her illustrations, but she handles it with grace. Unterzakhn is a quick read, but a meaningful one.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Baltimore City PaperÃ¢â ¬Å“Historically informed and aesthetically compelling . . . Heavily inked cartoons beautifully depict period details and the Hester Street gossips as times evolve, and show how the two sistersÃ¢â ¬â„¢ similarities change into stark differences in appearance as they age.Ã Â The text, salted with Yiddish, and the eloquently detailed images meld together to make this a good choice for readers who enjoyed Eleanor WidmerÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Up from Orchard Street or Hubert and KerascoetÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Miss DonÃ¢â ¬â„¢t Touch Me.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •BooklistÃ¢â ¬Å“Set in New YorkÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Lower East Side in the early twentieth century, Unterzakhn follows the lives of two sisters, Fanya and Esther . . . Corman gracefully traces both young womenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s efforts to maintain control of their bodies in

an unpredictable and at times violent world. She steeps her striking black-and-white artwork with period details, particularly in the clothes and the bustling street scenes.Ã Â In a flashback scene set in Russia, especially, she echoes the swirling evocative style of Russian folk art . . . The story of Fanya and EstherÃ¢â ¬â„¢s struggles is beautifully drawn and hard to forget.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Publishers Weekly

Leela Corman's graphic Novel , Unterzakhn is almost all that. The drawings are bold, making no compromises in the name of conventional modesty or modern notions of beauty. Twin Jewish girls grow up poor in 1910 New York and live parallel but not such different lives. The story is not one of an emigrant family making good but of half educated people surviving and attempting to make sense of an arbitrary world. Depending on when this book comes into your life it will have enormous power or just seem like "another one".The word Unterzakhn is Yiddish for underclothes. This is what the demanding and inflexible mother of twins girls Fanya and Ester makes to keep her family from complete poverty. What their soulful and unhappy father does is almost unimportant. The world of the two girls is hard. Death and cruelty are more common than joy or compassion. Only one will receive any education and the other will, because of her artistic bent will become a prostitute, dancer, and star.Irregular use of flashback will help the reader to understand that this family has survived generations of bigotry and bare survival and that the arranged marriage of the girl's parents is not the Fiddler on the Roof variety.There is too much about all of this that I have seen before. The story arc is too nearly predictable. If you come to this book before reading the story of failed immigrants, or the European stories of among others Isaac Bashevis Singer (his original Tevya stories are hardly all humor and happiness) then this can be a very important book. An experienced reader will believe they have felt the particular hardships by women of this class and time. This is a very good book, for me it was not 5 stars.

The characters were hard to keep track of because they looked alike and spoke in similar fashion.

Unusual story, art that was original and "out of the box," memorable and bold. This graphic novel stands apart from others for its unusual telling of two sisters and the world in which they lived, pre WWII, two Jewish sisters. It is an adult comic in theme and story that I would recommend to teenagers.

Unterzakhn explores the underside of the life of a girl growing up in a working class area of NYC

during the early 20th century. It is a straightforward and unrelentling telling that invites you to keep reading even though a good deal of the story presents subjects not usually noted in the history books - and for good reason. I think it is important for the reader to keep reminding himself/herself that this is indeed the story of some, but not all, poor Jewish families at that place and time. Given that, it is a fascinating read.

I took my time reading this beautiful story of twin girls who grow up on the Lower East Side at the beginning of the 20th century. If follows their divergent lives into the roaring 20's, with a little side step back to their father's life in Russia. The ending made me tear up! The artwork is lovely: bold black and white brush work. Highly recommended!

I loved this book!! I got totally lost in the story and had a difficult time putting it down. It was sad, but at the same time inspiring. It was a reminder to me of how far we, as women, have come. Very well done by a gifted graphic novelist, Leela Corman!!!

Great book, great subject

Gritty and real. Amazing illustrations

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