



## Pretty Deadly, Vol. 1: The Shrike

*Kelly Sue DeConnick , Emma Ríos (Illustrator)*

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KELLY SUE DeCONNICK (Avengers Assemble, Captain Marvel) and EMMA RÍOS (Dr. Strange, Osborn) present the collected opening arc of their surprise-hit series that marries the magical realism of Sandman with the western brutality of Preacher. Death's daughter rides the wind on a horse made of smoke and her face bears the skull marks of her father. Her origin story is a tale of retribution as beautifully lush as it is unflinchingly savage.

Collects PRETTY DEADLY #1-5

## Pretty Deadly, Vol. 1: The Shrike Details

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Author : Kelly Sue DeConnick , Emma Ríos (Illustrator)

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## From Reader Review *Pretty Deadly*, Vol. 1: *The Shrike* for online ebook

**Chad says**

I went back and reread this after so many others raved about it, but I still found this an incoherent mess of story and art. A lot of people love Emma Rios's art in this, but I found the action scenes to be a blurry jumble of images. I hate the trend of these small panels in action scenes. You can't tell what's going on in any of them. I think it's a crutch for artists who can't portray art in larger scenes more than anything innovative. As far as the story goes, it's the classic Death falls in love in the old West. The twist here is that Kelly Sue was wearing a pretentious beret while writing this. Honestly, go read *East of West* for a better version of the same story without the pretentiousness.

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**Karlyflower \*The Vampire Ninja, Luminescent Monster & Wendigo Nerd Goddess of Canada (according to The Hulk)\* says**

There is A LOT of weird stuff going on in *Pretty Deadly, Volume 1: The Shrike*; from a skeleton bunny narration to a butterfly.....

Skel-a-bunny!!! (if you know me, you know I have an obsession with skele-creatures – Not like Kelly does but so few can rank with her, really – and one of my all time favourite artists is Chiara Bautista for this exact reason.)

(This isn't a Bautista piece, to be clear, it's just a google search that I liked)

Anyways, so this story is kind of all over the map really. There is beauty being trapped by humanity and then stolen by death itself going on; an innocent being sacrificed for a greater good story arc and a burnt out cowboy seeking distraction from busty prostitutes. It really has everything cowboy-story wise going for it.

I LOVED the characters of Alice & Jinny so much.

I mean, how could I not?!

My biggest complaint about this would be the art, and it's not BAD don't get me wrong, I just didn't love it. It's a bit too busy and too sparse, in turns, for my liking. I found it both inconsistent (the female characters are MUCH more detailed than the male ones) and quite frankly ugly at times. Maybe it's too soon for me to have a preferred style, who knows, all I know is that whatever this is isn't mine.

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## Tfitoby says

Today, on a whim, I devoured this first volume of a female created **black fantasy-western hybrid**, I revelled in it's often **incredible and evocative artwork** and became engrossed in it's narrative despite being unsure of exactly what was happening until almost the final pages when things tied together in a **remarkable and hugely impressive** manner. The whole time I was thinking to myself how my friend who only loves Gaiman would be hugely impressed and that if Ennis could scale back the gross humour he just might have written something this brutal. It turns out that I wasn't the only person to draw the same comparisons, for once saying this book is X (*Sandman*) meets Y (*Preacher*) is not just a lazy marketing pull quote, it's entirely accurate, and yet missing out what makes this book stand on its own unique merits as a book to recommend to anyone interested in seeing what graphic novels *can* be when freed from the Marvel/DC superhero status quo. As Warren Ellis tells us, this is "grand and majestic storytelling" that utilises everything that makes the medium unique to full effect as words and pictures combine to create a powerful and thoroughly entertaining experience.

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## XX Sarah XX (former Nefarious Breeder of Murderous Crustaceans) says

**Err... What the hell what that?** Apart from a deadly pretentious, deadly uninteresting, deadly boring piece of utter confusion? I don't read many comics so I might have missed something here. Something that might have helped me understand why so **many reviewers rave** about Pretty Deadly. Some critics think it is "grand and majestic," others mention how "dark, alluring and original" it is. And you know what, I think that's the problem right there: **this comic tries too hard**. It tries too hard to be original. And cool. And grand. It almost feels as if DeConnick and Ríos are two immature students trying to impress their art school teachers: "Let's just throw everything we've got in there and **show them how awesomely creative we are!**"

**DeConnick and Ríos** definitely threw everything in there. The problem is, none of it makes any sense. The story is a paper thin, confusing mess. There are some interesting scenes here and there but **no overall coherence**. The characters are flat and under-developed. What their motivations are? No idea. What the point of all this is? **No idea**. Come to think of it, it almost feels like the script only exists so that Ríos can impress the readers with her **omg-I'm-so-cool art**.

**Ah. The art.** Problem #2: I didn't like it. At all. To be honest, I thought it was pretty ugly. There, I said it. Most reviewers seem to love Río's artwork. To me it was as confusing and tedious as the story. It kind of felt like there was too much of it somehow and it **desperately lacked clarity**. Some panels I just couldn't make sense of and most of the time I had no idea what the hell I was looking at. Sometimes I couldn't tell the characters apart. The close-up panels were **particularly confusing** and some of them were so crammed I had trouble figuring out what they were supposed to represent.

**How can you enjoy a comic** if you don't understand what you're looking at? The art ends up being a **hindrance to the story**. I did like Jordie Bellaire's color work but that alone wasn't enough to make this

work for me. Would I have appreciated the artwork more, had I been more comics savvy? Maybe. But I'm not. And I didn't. **So there you have it.**

? **Now what you should do** is read Nenia's review for Pretty Deadly. It's Pretty Interesting. And Pretty Cool. So much so that it might even convince you to give this a try. **Ha.**

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## **Gavin says**

OK, seriously...what the fuck was that?

"So Ms. DeConnick, what exactly were you hoping to accomplish here? Did you have a plot or plan for this to make more sense? Was there a reason for things?"

"I see. Butterfly and a dead bunny? Care to elaborate on the symbolism you've used here for our narrator(s)?"

"So...that's a no then? MMMkay. Moving right along...can you explain to us the origins of Johnny Coyote and how he fits in with Big Alice, Ginny, Sissy, and Death?"

"OK. Sorry...guess it's a secret. Do you plan to continue the series in the same manner with no character development, but lots of intense fight scenes?"

"Ah. Indeed. So pretty much you're just wingin' it and letting Rios' art carry your random musings?"

"Swell. It's been a pleasure. All the best in your future endeavors."

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## **Anne says**

I wanted to like it, but the story was all over the place and the art was very confusing for me in a lot of panels. Maybe it was because I read it digitally, but some of the action scenes were just too hard to

understand.

My overall impression was that the whole thing was cluttered with feathers.

If you like metaphorical shit and your stories don't need to make sense?

This will be your jam.

I mean, the issues are narrated by a dead rabbit and his BFF the butterfly. Because?

I don't fucking know.

What's this about?

Some *woo-woo* mythology shit about a death god set in the wild, wild west. Sorta. My problem with stuff like this is that I feel as though the author doesn't *really* know what story they are trying to tell, so they just toss some ideas out on the page and hope that the reader is pretentious enough to not call them on their bullshit.

**The emperor has no clothes!**

Or maybe I'm just stupid and need to be spoon fed everything.

**Not my cuppa.**

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### **Jan Philipzig says**

*Pretty Deadly* reinvents the spaghetti western as feminist, artsy, often experimental, surreal, metaphorically charged sub-genre that is a far cry from your typical contemporary superhero story. It's a unique reading experience: unnecessarily difficult in places (though it did not feel pretentious to me), but also rewarding in poetic and subversive ways that are a rare treat in popular culture. Oh, and the collaboration between writer Kelly Sue DeConnick & artist Emma Rios is officially the most organic, congenial comic-book team-up this side of Brubaker/Phillips territory. Recommended to fans of the more challenging kind of revisionist genre fiction!

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### **Jesse A says**

A bit hard to follow. The art was nice to look at though.

Reread: THE story was a bit easier to follow 2nd time around. I'm still not sure it's good. The art is still pretty.

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### **Marpapad says**

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/edit...#>

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**Jessica ❀ ➡ Silverbow ➡ ❀ Rabid Reads-no-more says**

**11/24/17 - ON SALE for \$3.99:**

<http://amzn.to/2zjQSN0>

**Reviewed by: Rabid Reads**

There's a special kind of chaos that went into the creation of PRETTY DEADLY.

The installments begin from the POV of a bunny and a butterfly and are told with fable-like flair, but as the main characters are human, there's a significance to our animal narrators that isn't immediately understood. I say "understood" b/c there's a lot that is never explained, just implied.

Combine that with the maelstrom of images that bombard you as the violence escalates, and . . . like I said, chaos.

That's not to say I didn't like this collection of the first five PRETTY DEADLY episodes, I absolutely did. I maybe even loved it.

The story woven through each installment had the feel of a folktale, but it was one I'd never heard before: a man wed a beautiful woman, and overcome with fear of losing her to another, he built a tower to keep her in. She swore she'd die if he locked her away, and that's what she did . . . But not before Death fell in love with her too.

After that things get interesting.

And when the art wasn't making my eyes twitch (b/c overwhelming), it was beautiful . . . but sometimes also disturbing . . . Pretty . . . Deadly . . . I see what you did there . . .

Basically, it's a new fairy tale set in Wild West with gorgeous artwork, AND it's clever to boot. What's not to like? Highly recommended.

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## Keith says

Second in my lineup of Keith Reads All The Image, I went for *Pretty Deadly*. The first time I read it I realized by the second chapter that I had absolutely no idea what was happening, and by the fourth chapter I decided I was just going to have to slog through it to get the beats down, and read it a second time.

It mostly made sense on the second read, but I'm still baffled by the book's existence in these perilous times. Perhaps the point is stronger right now because I just came off Matt Fraction's risqué but ultimately streamlined *Sex Criminals*, but in our current media landscape I just can't believe a book as obtuse, impenetrable and whackadoo as this one is coming out of a company as big as Image. More experimental by far than most self-published fare I've seen, even with benefit of hindsight this book is pretty looperdoo.

Its internal mythology is both extremely sure of itself, and also less-than-minimally-interested in betraying itself to the reader in an eloquent way. There's people in animal forms and animal in people forms and people who *say* they're animals but it's probably just a metaphor. The majority of the plot is explained in a series of terrible limericks in the first three pages, before you actually know who any of the characters are or what the story is about in the first place. There's immortal grim reapers and mortal grim reapers and gardens that are also bisected guardians to the Underworld.

There's two narrators who are a butterfly and a bunny skeleton.

I mean What. The. Living. Fuck.

The art and design of the book is so totally gorgeous and fluid that even if none of that makes sense (it doesn't), you'll still be willing to read it twice to sort it out. And this is the first book I've read that *really* reminds me of the heady swagger of the first time I read *The Sandman* when I was sixteen.

This formidable praise isn't without a smidgen of concern, as much of *Sandman* seems kinda goofy to me now. But the important thing is that I have read (and you have read, probably) a thousand comics trying to achieve that level of all-encompassing world-building magic, and even if it comes at the cost of bad limericks, *PD* is 100% nailing it.

It's a wholly imperfect book, but a very real one. It might only be surviving on luck, incredible art, and pure verve, but I think I'm cool with that. It's a fantasy death western with more female characters than male ones! And it's put out by Image, who is in fact doing a lot of things interesting, and a lot of things right.

It's narrated by a butterfly and bunny skeleton. You do what you need to with that.

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## Crystal Starr Light says

Bullet Review:

Very different from any other comic I've read. Probably most like Vaughan's *Saga* if anything. Cross-genre with vivid art but the story is more than slightly confusing. It took me quite some time to realize that the



Bunny at the beginning DIES and becomes a skeleton. In fact, there are a LOT of panels I had to read and reread before I "got" it or gave up.

That said, the characters were cool (TONS of women), and I am interested enough to check out Volume 2.

**UPDATED:** On Second Thought, not sure why I am rating so high. Yes, it's better than Ghost, but not that much. It's confusing as hell, and just plain...huh? Not bad, may still continue, but not as fantastic as other Deconnick's works.

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## **Wil Wheaton says**

Absolutely brilliant storytelling and mind-blowing art combine to make a story that you'll want to read again the instant you finish it.

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## **Online Eccentric Librarian says**

*More reviews (and no fluff) on the blog <http://surrealtalvi.wordpress.com/>*

Pretty Deadly is a lyrical, fairytale type of story set in the Old West but firmly rooted in folklore and fables. Seemingly disparate threads slowly converge as the story unfolds, creating a mesmerizing story of love and loss. This is another great example of how graphic novels are a true artform - illustrations furthering story, with each working together to create a unique and distinct tale.

Story: A butterfly and a bunny have a story to tell about several girls/women; of particular, a child in a vulture suit who follows a blind man, telling stories at small towns for money. Enter a ginger-haired gunslinger with a talking crow, the daughter of death himself, and the story of love gone wrong and you have a grand adventure in life and beyond. As for the bunny and butterfly? The bunny is shot through the head in the first panel and continues the tale in bone form thereafter.

What we have is a solid story, very well thought out and then exquisitely executed in full color artwork. This isn't a spaghetti Western; rather, a fable that just happens to be set in the old West. What really surprised me were the successive layers with each chapter. What seemed inconsequential or trivial in the beginning soon begins to take on new dimension and definition. Odd nuances and mysterious characters slowly develop through words and images, each chapter pushing the reader to continue to solve the riddles of the beginning. This is definitely a book that rewards with each subsequent rereading - from a cat hiding under floorboards as a dog walks blithely by to the lyricism of the story within a story told by the old man Fox.

For once, in a Western and a comic, we have very strong female characters, many flawed but all facing their fate head on and with determination. For really, this series is the story of those women: mothers, daughters, lovers, and wives.

Pretty Deadly completes a very solid story arc, answering all the main questions to satisfaction, yet leaves the story open to continue in further issues.

## Sam Quixote says

Pretty Deadly Volume 1 should come with a beret, it's so art school-y. Writing-wise that is as, while Kelly Sue DeConnick's writing and storytelling is dull and pretentious, Emma Rios and Jordie Bellaire bring their A-game to the art.

Pretty Deadly's a western set sometime in 19th century America during the frontier days but the story is heavy on the magical realism/mythologising brand of storytelling that makes it feel like a fable of sorts. And that's what the first volume is, very broadly: the origin of how Sissy, a little girl wearing a vulture's skin, became Death. I say very broadly because DeConnick throws in a ton of other stuff to confuse the reader which turns the story into an absolute mess by the final chapter.

I'm going to talk spoilers for the rest of the review so if you want to avoid all of that and just get my quick takeaway now, here it is: DeConnick is a crap writer and storyteller and Pretty Deadly is a woeful reading experience most of the time. But Emma Rios' art has never looked more incredible and, coupled with Jordie Bellaire's amazing colours, this is easily one of the best looking comics I've read all year, if not the best. So it's worth picking up and taking a leisurely look through it, enjoying the gorgeous panels and breathtaking covers. But if you're looking for a great western comic, that also incorporates magic and the supernatural, check out Cullen Bunn and Brian Hurtt's *The Sixth Gun* series, where the writing matches the quality of the art.

'kay? Spoilers a-hoy-hoy!

Right from the start the book has the quality of a creation myth as a butterfly and a skeleton bunny tell each other the story of Deathface Ginny, Death's daughter. If Pretty Deadly fully committed to the idea of a myth-like story, I'd be more lenient on it, but it doesn't so I won't. If it were just a myth, I'd not mention the non-existent character development and often bizarre plot developments as these are qualities in myth stories.

The point of myth/creation stories is not to tell a convincing story in the conventional sense but to impart a message or moral. Myths are also usually straightforward in that sense as they're a disguised message, but an understandable one - Pretty Deadly is convoluted to the point of indecipherability.

Sometimes Pretty Deadly is a myth, but quite often it wants to be both an action movie and a hip anime, and it wants emotional resonance with its characters. So it effectively takes itself out of the myth genre and tries to go for a plethora of things, all of which means character and plot critiques are fair game.

But it's more than just the vague vision it's sort of aiming for that bothered me, it's the way it staggers around to get from point A to point B. I think this is the story of Sissy becoming Death because that's where the story ends up but if you asked me before it got to the end what it's about, I'd have to say: I have no idea. Big Alice is hunting Deathface Ginny, while Sissy's guardian, the old blind Fox (this is another quality of myths - animals/animal names feature prominently), who's an old dude and not a real fox, is trying to save Sissy from something and also trying to find redemption, and Death is involved somehow. And what's with the framing device of the skeleton bunny and butterfly?!

The more deeply you look into Pretty Deadly the more superficial it seems as DeConnick fails to join the

dots in her story to make it's story meaningful to the reader. And all it does is raise numerous questions that for the life of me I can't answer.

What was Johnny Coyote's story - something about giving Sissy a note that somehow brought Big Alice to her attention? What was he supposed to get out of that and how does he know her? And then why did he get involved later if he fulfilled his purpose?

What was Big Alice's story - bring in Deathface Ginny? Why? And, after a pretty epic fight with her, why did she return, reincarnated, for a second round without any game plan only to die again, for no reason?

What was Ginny's story - run away from domineering dad, Death? Running away from her destiny as the next Death? Did she have a story?

What was Death's story - kill everyone? Seems straightforward, he IS Death, but why does Death have such a problem meting out death?

Why was Fox hiding Sissy - did he not want her to become Death? Was that his wish or hers? Because Sissy does become Death, so is that a happy ending? And, while it was important for her to live life to become the avatar of death, to appreciate the burden, does it really qualify as living if you've only "lived" for a few years - wouldn't it be more meaningful if you lived a full life, ie. 'til old age, BEFORE becoming Death? And why were they tooling about the old west putting on shows anyway?! What was Fox getting out of telling his life story to an audience?

I paid attention to the story, I even made notes, and I went back and re-read entire chapters, and I still had no idea what the point of anything was in this book. If these "characters" had stories, DeConnick doesn't pursue them much, choosing instead Sissy's fight and flight story over all else, which didn't really make much sense in the first place. The final chapter really underlines this as characters, shoot one another, die left and right and I still had no idea who I was supposed to root for and why. I think Sissy, because she's an innocent, right? Whatever.

DeConnick's a bad writer because she's unable to create 1) characters whose motivations are understandable, 2) characters who feel remotely real, and 3) a coherent plot. She's able to conjure up scenes that are interesting in themselves, like having a biblical flood happen in one issue, or a trip to hell in another, and gun and sword fights in canyons between two supernatural beings, but when you slot them against one another and try to make them flow as a single story, it fails completely.

Like I said, Emma Rios' art is outstanding. The frontier vistas are stunning, her action scenes fluid and well-paced, and her character designs really eye-catching - I guarantee Deathface Ginny'll be a con staple for years to come! Jordie Bellaire's colours perfectly complement Rios' art, using bright colours to give the drab ol' west a feeling of otherworldly vibrancy that suits the supernatural tone of the story.

I'm not going to keep reading Pretty Deadly as this is my third DeConnick book now (I've also read her Captain Marvel at Marvel and Ghost over at Dark Horse) and I can tell this writer isn't for me, but if I see it on the shelf of my local library, I'll pick it up and enjoy the art.

And that's Pretty Deadly - pretty terribly written!

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