



Velvet, Vol. 1: Before the Living End

Ed Brubaker (Writer) , Steve Epting (Artist) , Elizabeth Breitweiser (Colourist) , Chris Eliopoulos (Letterer) , Drew Gill (Production)

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From the bestselling creators of *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* comes this smash-hit spy thriller with a unique new twist!

When the world's greatest secret agent is killed, all evidence points to Velvet Templeton, the personal secretary to the Director of the Agency. But Velvet's got a dark secret buried in her past... because she's also the most dangerous woman alive!

Collecting: *Velvet* 1-5

Velvet, Vol. 1: Before the Living End Details

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From Reader Review Velvet, Vol. 1: Before the Living End for online ebook

Kemper says

Other reviewers have already pointed out that this story essentially asks what would happen if James Bond got killed, and it turned out that Miss Money Penny was more of a bad-ass than he ever was? So in an effort to come up with a new way of describing this I'll ask what if Sterling Archer got killed, and Cheryl/Carol was more of a bad-ass than he ever was?

In 1973 Velvet Templeton is the secretary to the director of super-secret spy agency ARC-7. After their best agent is ambushed and killed Velvet is implicated as the mole who set him up, but it turns out that she knows a lot more than just how to take shorthand. Velvet was actually a great field agent in the '50s before events forced her into accepting a desk job. To clear her name Velvet has to get back in the spy game to track down who actually betrayed their agent.

There's been a lot of talk lately about the lack of diversity in comics as well as the movies adapted from them, and it's very refreshing to have the lead of this promising series be a forty-something female in an era where women were either the secretary to the good guys or the honey trap working for the bad guys. And Velvet is an intriguing character with all the skills of Marvel's Black Widow with the looks of real life hard-boiled crime writer Christa Faust minus the tattoos.

Brubaker again delivers a version of yet another fantastic genre tale with a unique twist to it. Epting's excellent art is realistic enough to be storyboards for a movie but still stylized to provide the atmosphere of a Bond movie from the Sean Connery era. Maybe its best trick is the way that the story blends the old school comic book style spy action with the darker John le Carre tone of exploring the toll that working in covert espionage takes on someone.

Overall it's a terrific comic that I can't wait to read more of.

Jeff says

Ed Brubaker has few peers when it comes to the graphic novel spy game.

Case in point: Velvet Templeton, - the personal secretary to the Director of the Agency, Britain's top spy shop - photographic memory, excellent shorthand, willing to work late hours, brews tea without equal, and was one of the most deadly agents the Agency had ever employed. This is a secret known to only a few, but when the top male agent goes down and she gets swept away in the finger pointing, all bets are off as her training kicks in and the body count starts to go up.

One thing that Brubaker and artist Steve Epting excel at is the ability to transition the reader back into Velvet's past. With other books that's an issue that can undo a story in a matter of pages. Here, the ebb and flow of time as it washes over Velvet is expertly and painlessly conveyed.

One of the best series I've read this year and highly recommended.

Danielle The Book Huntress (Back to the Books) says

Velvet is the Real Deal!!!

I picked this up because I have enjoyed other volumes by Brubaker. He definitely has the noir, crime story vibe down. This book is about a woman who everyone has been overlooked because she's the Moneypenny (as in Miss Moneypenny from the James Bond series). Nice to flirt with, make travel arrangements, and take notes in the meetings for her Director. She holds the keys to the kingdom in that way that Executive Assistants often do, but not who you would consider a field agent. Well, they learn quite to their surprise that still waters run deep. This woman is a serious bad*ss! When one of the field agents get killed and the frame starts to fit Velvet Templeton, she goes off the reservation and puts herself back into active service. It turns out she's one of the most lethal agents her agency ever ran.

I'm a huge spy fan. I especially love action-oriented spy stories. While I will occasionally sit down and watch a movie like "Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy" (admittedly for Benedict Cumberbatch), I prefer spy stories with lots and lots of action. This one doesn't disappoint. And I love that the beginning is a bit of a misdirection. You think this is about the boys, but nope. This woman gives the boys a run for their number. Keep reading and you realize exactly why this is called "Velvet."

I loved this book. It's violent and has some sexual content, but nothing I couldn't handle. I'm giving Velvet a high-five. She's definitely a Grade A Kickbutt Artist, and she knows her spycraft just as well as James Bond. If things had went differently, perhaps Sydney Bristow might have ended up like Velvet. I'm reading Volume 2 right now and it's probably even better!

This so needs to be a movie one day!

Overall rating: **4.5/5.0 stars.**

Vicky (the Blowtorch-Wielding OotCDCB™) says

This was the second graphic novel I read (ever) and I'm delighted to say that The Wicked + The Divine, Vol. 1: The Faust Act was not a one-time deal for me. I actually seem to love GNs! **That moment when you realize you've found a new niche of untapped potential in reading material:**

Now, before I actually review this book let me take a moment to tell you about how silly I can be sometimes:

For some unexplainable reason, **before I started reading GNs I believed the characters in them *must* be unavoidably a bit flat and hard to connect with.** Because, you know, GNs are so much shorter than "regular" novels, and their pages are mostly filled with pictures (view spoiler) and a couple of bubbles with short snatches of text and onomatopoeia (view spoiler) in them... so there couldn't be room for meaningful characterization in there. *Right?*

I'm embarrassed by my own prejudices and silliness. But that's okay, because I've learned my lesson now. **Velvet proved me wrong.**

Meet Velvet:

She is a **spy**. She is a **badass**. She **kicks ass**.

Velvet is *also* a **3 dimensional character**. I was just expecting to get this cartoonish spy character that would spend the whole book jumping out of buildings or moving vehicles and generally kicking ass, but who wouldn't have many layers to peel...

To be clear, she *did* do all the things I mentioned before.

^^Yes, that's her *jumping off a moving car and onto a moving motorcycle*. Because she's that cool!

Still, there's *so much more* than that to Velvet. **She's got real issues for which I sympathize with her.** Her story involves betrayals, disappointments, regrets, and a past that starts popping up and messing with her life. She also has to deal with sexist pricks who overlook her because she's *just a woman*, and a *secretary* at that. Don't worry, she'll set them straight real soon!

I love that Velvet is not a 20-year-old, 90-60-90 sex symbol that looks like a runway model while fighting the bad guys. *Not that there's anything wrong with young pretty women!* But I really like that she has expression lines on her face, that **she is an older and experienced spy who fights dirty when she needs to and isn't romanticized.**

That said, she is definitely a sexy woman who I might or might not be developing a girl-crush on ;-).

Story-wise: **This spy thriller hooked me from the start and never let go.** In fact, I had trouble pacing myself and not reading it all in one sitting. But I'm glad I took my time to enjoy each page. At first I missed the pretty pictures from TW+TD but soon I realized that **the dark atmosphere created by Steve Epting and Elizabeth Breitweiser was exactly what this story needed**, and I ended up loving every page of it. The **action scenes got my blood pumping**. I loved the **plot-twists and surprises**. Finally, the time jumps were extremely well handled, not only time-stamped at the beginning of each scene but also differentiated with the colors of the graphics, which helped a lot with the transitions.

In a nutshell: A page-turner with lots of action and an awesome heroine in whose story I became quickly invested. I definitely recommend it!

Trish says

Holy shit! Some people just got their asses handed to them. By a woman. By a woman clearly over 30!

How many times has some arrogant suit walked into my office, thinking he owns the world and I was his servant *because I'm just a secretary*. *imitates very annoying nasal voice*
And how many times have I wanted to punch that kind of guy?! EXACTLY!

Velvet is a secretary. Well, not JUST ANY secretary but also a secretary. And she's not taking shit from anybody, that's for sure. From page 1 we know that she's a little minx, having fun with a lot of agents of that secret agency she's working for. We also see her getting framed in a murder conspiracy that killed one of the best agents (with whom she had slept a couple of times).
So what is she supposed to do other than suiting up, taking matters into her own - very capable - hands and proving her innocence by taking down the ones behind this conspiracy?

I really don't want to give away more of the story. Instead, I'd like to focus on Velvet herself.
First thing I noticed is the similarity between her and X-Men's Rogue. That white strand of hair ... I just couldn't stop thinking about that. But that's just me. *lol*
The actual first thing that basically jumps the reader is that this woman isn't a teenager. Usually, heroines (in movies and comic books) are in their 20s. Late 20s at the most. It's as if women die when they turn 30. Urgh. I'm not 30 yet but even I get exasperated by that. I mean, developing a skill (any skill) takes time. So when did the usual heroines start their training? Back in kindergarden?!
Also, Velvet proves beyond a doubt that women, no matter their age, can be sexy as hell. I'm not usually into women but boy was Velvet sexy! I might have developed a crush on her. ;p

She can do what the men in the story can do and then some. Also, she uses not just her muscles but also her brain. Huge plus.

I've liked secret agent stories for quite a while, can't wait to see the latest *James Bond*, definitely like women kicking ass and the age-thing really sold it. Thus, it was fairly easy for some people here to talk me into buying and reading this.
Comic books might not be my number one genre but there seem to be a few gems that are exactly what I like. I definitely loved this!
In fact, I loved this so much that I've already started the next one. ;p

Donovan says

"That's the problem with lies...they're so much *prettier* than the truth."

Okay, that was fun. I mean there's still Brubaker drama and darkness, but what a great story and fantastic artwork!

I'm not really a fan of spy thrillers. I do enjoy James Bond movies. But this was surprisingly entertaining, not

at all dry, and it kept me on my toes. There's great action and intrigue, mystery, exotic characters, and tons of violence: fighting, shooting, chasing, and of course EXPLOSIONS! The violence is pretty graphic, standard fare for Brubaker, and it's awesome.

"I was raw, I was angry, I was real."

I really enjoy Velvet Templeton as a character. She quickly sheds her frankly demeaning secretary disguise to become a strong, independent, smart, and badass woman. She's older but still attractive (not that it matters, really) and kicks the shit out of tons of dudes! At first I thought she was being portrayed as a little too sexually easy going, but I realized that's a play on the trope of male spies being womanizers. And she has sex when and how she wants to suit her needs. I mean, that is empowerment, isn't it? There is nudity but it's subtle, which I also find flattering.

Steve Epting's artwork is beautiful. He can definitely keep up with Brubaker's usual partner Sean Phillips and that's truly saying something. And his illustration style is less cartoony and more rich and painterly, and when combined with Elizabeth Breitweiser's fantastic subtle colors creates great depth. The artwork alone is worth admission.

Another brilliant work by Brubaker. I was surprised by its depth and that of Velvet. You'd think she'd just be "some girl" shooting and jumping motorcycles, and she does those things, but she has a complex and tragic past you'll be excited to read about.

Sam Quixote says

What if Miss Money Penny was more than just a secretary – what if she was actually deadlier than Bond? And what would happen if she was backed into a corner?

Velvet Templeton is a desk jockey in an MI6 facsimile called ARC-7 at the height of the Cold War in 1973. X-14, the agency's best spy, is killed by an unknown assassin, as is the retired agent who trained him – and Velvet has been framed for the murders!

Hunted as a traitor by her former employers, they quickly realise she's far more accomplished than she let on and is extremely dangerous. So begins Velvet's investigation to find the real killer and clear her name, a journey that takes her deep into the Soviet bloc, the world of double agents and her own past – who's working for who?

The first, last and only thing that needs to be said about Velvet is, oh lordy trouble so hard, Steve Epting's art is INCREDIBLE!! His work on previous collaborations with Ed Brubaker over at Marvel, like their amazing Captain America run which included The Winter Soldier, as well as The Marvels Project, has always been first class, but his work on Velvet - man, who knew that by taking away the masks and capes, Epting would find a near-zen level of art?

It's photorealistic in a way that's not too real and not too unreal either - it's a perfect balance that mixes comics with reality in an enormously pleasing way. And, unlike other photorealistic art styles, his figures never look clunky or stiff, which is crucial because there's a lot of fast-paced action in this book. The car chase in the second chapter is something else, he plots it so well, panel by panel, that it's like watching a film - in fact there's something to say about every set piece here in the way Epting's chosen to execute it, but it's

the quieter moments that you get to see the genius in his work through his subtlety.

There's a scene in the rain at night when a subordinate goes to his boss at the front door of a gentleman's club where he reports to him that Velvet got away. The rain's coming down, their conversation is lamplit, and... it's breathtaking. You can almost hear the rain in that scene and I swear, if you look at the panels askance, the characters freaking move!

You know what, I'm going to stop there because I'm starting to foam at the mouth (and I haven't even mentioned the Carnival of Fools sequence!) but my word, Steve Epting - his work on Velvet is a career best from an already impressive career.

Let's talk about the story because the "spy on the run" thing has been done before and yet somehow Ed Brubaker's managed to breathe new life into it. Brubaker really proves that it's not the originality of the concept but the execution that matters, and, despite noting plot elements from other spy stories, Velvet's journey into the dark hearts of international government affairs is never less than riveting every step of the way.

Lest you think it's all spies sneaking in shadows with tiny cameras, Velvet proves she's got the goods several times here, destroying groups of armed soldiers and assassins in hand-to-hand combat, driving insanely into oncoming traffic, leaping off of buildings, going to casinos, using cool experimental gadgets, even bedding hot younger men - she IS the female Bond!

Spy stories can sometimes get a little convoluted when double agents are introduced and the reader has to follow who's really working for who and who's selling out who, but Brubaker is able to keep all the threads straight so that when he utilises flashbacks (sparingly), it's to full effect, fleshing out the current scene while keeping the plot propelling forwards.

And while I've mentioned Bond, Brubaker's Velvet highlights the dark side of the spy game showing the effects it has on the spies themselves rather than just focusing on the flashy, exciting good times. It really is Brubaker's best work in years.

Velvet's creative team fires on all cylinders with both Brubaker and Epting spinning their most compelling collaborative effort yet with an outstanding original character. It's also one of the best spy thrillers I've ever read - comics or prose fiction - and easily the best looking one too thanks to Epting's work. Do NOT miss this masterpiece in the making!

Cheese says

Another fantastic spy/noir thriller from Brubaker. He really is the best at this kind of story and it's the first time I've seen a female spy written so well.

Her name is velvet and she's the secretary for a super dooper secret spy agency. What even the spies don't know is that she used to be the best spy in the agency.

The story: a super dooper secret agent gets killed and that is super rare for this agency which means only one thing - there's a mole in the agency! Commence action and espionage and accusations and velvet is on the run! She's being framed for the murder of an old friend.

Now it's up to her to find out what happened.

The way she's portrayed in this is likened to a female James Bond, but with class. It was a really enjoyable thriller and I can't wait to read the next volume. I highly recommend this and all of Brubaker's noir and spy work. If you like this you will love 'the fade out'.

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

Move over James Bond, Miss Money Penny is taking over.

Mind if we talk about me for a minute? No? Thanks. So lovely of you.

I've never been a comics fan. I never read comics growing up and my life has always revolved around books, books, books and more books. I remember visiting my cousins as a little girl, seeing comics everywhere and thinking to myself: "these people are weird. Their books are full of pictures. Where are all the words? **And what are all these bubbles for anyway?**"

So there I was, living happily ever after (figuratively speaking obviously, there are no HEAs, you silly) in my books-only world when I came across a review for *The Wicked + The Divine*. **And I thought to myself:** "well that looks intriguing. But it's a comic. I'm not actually considering **buying** a comic now am I? A silly thing full of pictures? What is wrong with me?" And then I thought to myself: **"time to put the crazy on, time to buy a COMIC!"**

Wanna know what happened?

Smurfs begone! This ain't no Asterix world! Yes, reading *The Wicked + The Divine* was pretty much a mystic revelation for me (you know, the skies opening up and all that). So when Nick suggested I read *Velvet* I just couldn't resist. I mean, spy thriller + girl power? I was doomed. **And here we are.**

To be honest, I wasn't a HUGE fan of the graphics at first but I have to say they grew on me as the story progressed. And now I think they're very cool. See this ↓↓↓? **Very cool I tell you.**

I've always been a huge James Bond fan. Not the Daniel Craig version (please don't insult me), the Sean Connery version. What really is amazing here is that Epting perfectly recreates the atmosphere of the **early Bond films**. Reading this comic actually made me want to watch a "from *Dr No* to *Diamonds Are Forever*" marathon (if you have no idea what I'm talking about here let me tell you, **your education has been severely lacking**).

Some of the art here is absolutely amazing. The level of detail is impressive and the general mood set by

Epting **fits the era perfectly.**

The coolest thing about Velvet? Velvet Templeton, obviously. It's 1973, the height of the Cold War. Velvet is the personal secretary to the director of the MI6-like Agency. After the Agency's best agent is killed, all evidence points to Velvet as the mole behind the execution. **Now why would a boring personal assistant have anything to do with the murder of a spy?** Velvet isn't your everyday secretary you see. She was one of the agency's top agents in the 1950s, until she was forced into early retirement and ended up spending her days behind a desk. **Now what do you do when you're wrongfully accused of a crime?** You run for your life and try to clear your name. The race is on.

What I love here is the way Brubaker chose to portray Velvet: a forty-something female spy during the Cold War, generally kicking ass and using men as much as they used women at the time. **How will you have your clichés Mr Brubaker?** Shaken **and** stirred, thank you very much. **Take that Mr Bond.**

The story is simply fantastic. It's dark, fast-paced, action-packed and the flashbacks about Velvet's spy days add a lot of depth to the plot. **The twists and turns** keep you engaged until the very last page. Open this comic at your own risk. Because when you do **you won't be able to put it down.**

You like good old spy stories? You like James Bond? You like badass chicks? Then Velvet was made for you. READ IT NOW.

David - proud Gleeman in Branwen's adventuring party says

Dave's Quick Judgement -

THE DEFENSE

- Lead heroine is kick-ass, yet also sympathetic.
- More emotional depth than you find in your average spy thriller.
- Plenty of action.
- Velvet's inner dialogue is even more heart-pounding than the action sequences.
- Jaw-dropping twist at the end.

THE PROSECUTION

- Unfortunately, there's also still loads of unanswered questions at the end.
- Only 128 pages?!? I WANT MORE!!!!

THE VERDICT

Much like he did with his sublime "Sleeper" series, Ed Brubaker once again proves he's the absolute best at bringing the world of espionage to the graphic novel genre!

Sesana says

This is like a great Bond movie. Except that Miss Money Penny is the star, and she's far more accomplished and dangerous a spy than anyone ever expected. Brubaker does some of his best work away from the capes, so I was far from surprised with how fantastically he wrote this spy thriller. I'm fascinated by the story, which promises to have far more twists and turns ahead. And I love Velvet herself, as much as I love Brubaker for inventing a Cold War female spy who's more than sex appeal. I also love him for visiting the aftermath of a Bond-style seduction, and showing what might happen to those women left in his wake.

And the art? Sheer perfection. I'm not really good at talking about art in a book review, and this sure won't be an exception. But I can say that the mood, the level of detail, everything is absolutely perfect for this style of book set in this era. Magnificent work.

I love Brubaker's work, enough that I was eager to read this knowing little more than that it was his work, and it didn't have superheroes. That was all I needed to know, and I was right. This is just great work.

Jan Philipzig says

What if Miss Money Penny was more than just the agency's secretary? What if she used to be a super-spy in her own right? You know, without anybody being aware of it, the most secret of all secret agents... Okay, it may not be the most original or convincing premise in the world, and the execution also tends to be a bit on the generic side. And yet, this being a Brubaker book, it's all stylish enough to make it worth your while.

Anne says

4.5 stars

Hey! It's an old chick who can kick ass!

Ok, maybe *old* isn't the right word, Velvet isn't exactly using a walker to get around, but she's no spring chicken.

Most of the folks at her Top Secret agency think she's *just* a secretary. Kinda like Bond's Miss Money Penny.

But when a top agent gets killed, and a highly decorated agent in retirement becomes the suspect, Velvet decides to do a little investigation of her own on the side. And what she discovers is that someone has gone to a lot of trouble to frame that man...and her. Looks like her only option is to go on the run and try to find out who's behind dragging a good agent's name through the mud. But what kind of chance does a secretary have when going up against double agents and assassins?

Turns out, a pretty good one.

Because while she **is** a secretary, that wasn't always the case.

This Moneypenny gig isn't where she started out. Nope. Back in the day, she was the best of the best.

And she's still got a few tricks up her sleeve...

Dear Mr. Brubaker,

Thank you for making a female heroine who isn't 20 years old, but still has it going on.

Sincerely,

An Old Chick.

This was really a lot of fun to read, and I'm hoping I can continue on with the next volume. And thanks again to Mike for gifting me with this one. I think I have a lead on an Alpha Flight toothbrush...only *slightly* used!

Steve says

Outstanding spy-thriller, and a world-class heroine: smart, sexy, and unstoppable.

Brandon says

When the top agent for the spy organization ARC-7 is murdered, all evidence points to Velvet Templeton, the unassuming organization's secretary. She's innocent but capturing her is proving difficult and those hot on her trail are meeting the true Velvet, the retired secret agent with the skills to pay the bills.

While recently on vacation in Ottawa, I dropped into The Comic Shoppe to pick up Ed Brubaker and Sean Phillips new noir series The Fade Out. I couldn't find it so I asked the clerk if he had any available. When he came back with issue one, he asked if I had already picked up Brubaker's new trade, The Velvet. Even though everyone on Goodreads had been raving about it, it had somehow slipped my mind. I went in for one issue but came out with two books! It was like comic book Christmas.

Image is putting out some of the best work in the industry right now (Saga, The Fade Out, Fatale, The Walking Dead) and Velvet is no exception. Ed Brubaker's razor sharp writing paired alongside Steve Epting's beautiful artwork combine to create a compelling vision of mid 20th century cold war hysteria. There are enough twists and turns in here to keep its audience engaged and it certainly doesn't hurt to have such jaw-droppingly gorgeous visuals either.

I can't wait for volume two. Write, Brubaker, write!

Also posted @ Every Read Thing
