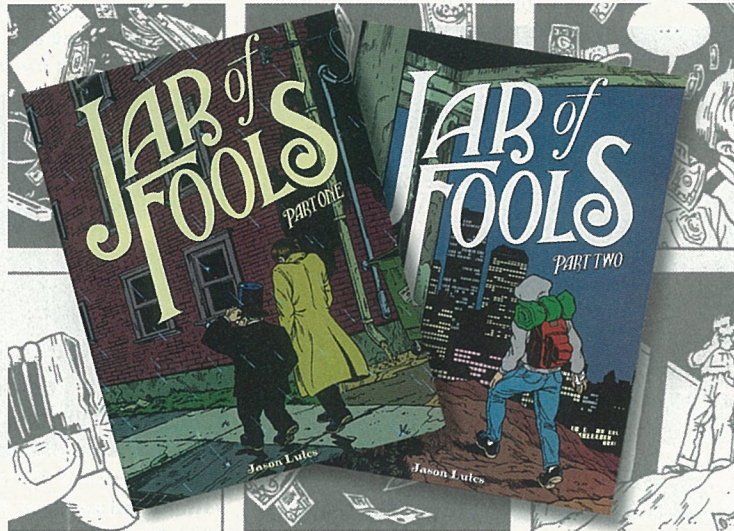


## Magic's Last Gasp

The wonder of a small-time magician, the lingering heartbreak of separation, and the misery of emotional isolation are not your usual subject matter for a comic book. Yet Jason Lutes's hauntingly spare *Jar of Fools* takes on all that and more in a tale of lives unhinged.

Set in a fictionalized Seattle, this two-part graphic novel traces the downward spiral of young magician Ernie "Ernesto" Weiss. Behind on his rent and plagued alternately by visions of his brother's suicide and by the bittersweet remembrance of life with his old girlfriend, he is adrift on a sea of rain and regret. Woven into the tale are Al Flosso, a refugee from a seniors home who has his own mental-health woes, and a small-time con man by the name of Nathan Lender, who seeks a better life for his motherless daughter, Claire.

These characters' lives unravel in a slow-motion pictogram of depth and sincerity as they both help and hurt each other in ways far more real than on, say, MTV's *The Real World*. Magical spells, the kind that Harry Houdini used to practice, sit along the borders and



**Emotionally isolated lives adrift in a Seattle sea of rain and regret.**

panels of the story quietly giving the reader some slim hope that redemptive powers may yet make everything all right.

Intermingled dream sequences and hallucinatory images not only convey Ernie's shaky grasp of reality, as he struggles through the daily miseries of his life, but other characters' fractured emotional states as well. Much as a film editor employs visual tricks, Lutes allows dreams to flow into real time with nary a twitch in style as he turns the tale into an otherworldly storyspace.

The story itself is so masterfully told that it could stand alone as a novella in *Harper's*. When combined with Lutes's spare black-and-white line drawings and creative use of the comic book medium, it becomes something transcendent - a piece of literature that speaks to the emotional core. First serialized in Seattle and Providence, Rhode Island, *Jar of Fools* is now available at comic book stores everywhere.  
- Todd Krieger

*Jar of Fools*, by Jason Lutes: US\$6.95 each for Part One and Two. Black Eye Productions: +1 (514) 274 8375, email [mail@blackeye.com](mailto:mail@blackeye.com).