



## Bloom County Digital Library Vol. 1 (Bloom County- The Complete Library)

*By Berkeley Breathed*

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### **Bloom County Digital Library Vol. 1 (Bloom County- The Complete Library) By Berkeley Breathed**

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Collecting every strip from December 8, 1980, through December 31, 1981, in chronological order, with a new cover insert by Breathed.

Berkeley Breathed's Bloom County burst onto the American comic scene in December 1980 and it soon became one of the most popular comic strips of all time. The endearing and quirky denizens of the strip included Milo Bloom, Steve Dallas, Michael Binkley, Cutter John, Bill the Cat, and Opus the Penguin.

Bloom County was a strip that dealt with many issues relevant to the period. Occasional "Context comments" are added throughout this collection, giving the reader a greater understanding of the time.

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## **Bloom County Digital Library Vol. 1 (Bloom County- The Complete Library) By Berkeley Breathed Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

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When Bloom County first hit the comics pages in 1980, it was widely dismissed as a Doonesbury rip-off, understandably enough, considering their similar artistic styles—crudely drawn figures in unvarying medium shots—and subject matter considered provocative by the staid standards of newspaper comics. As the first in a five-volume collection of the strip's entire run reveals, Breathed's approach was more outrageous and exaggerated from the very start, and Bloom County's residents were more offbeat than Doonesbury's recognizable campus types. Early on, boy reporter Milo Bloom and sleazy attorney and would-be lothario Steve Dallas carried the action; the wistful heart of the strip, Opus the Penguin, arrived early in 1982; and the squirrely anti-Garfield, Bill the Cat, debuted later that year. Fans who have missed Bloom County since Breathed retired from syndicated comics in 2008 will relish the chance to reread the Pulitzer Prize-winning strip. Newcomers to the highly topical strip will doubtless appreciate the annotations explaining such phenomena of its era as James Watt and the Falklands War. --Gordon Flagg

### Review

Berkeley Breathed's comic strip made sport of all the '80s' hot topics: Reaganism, the Moral Majority, the wedding of Charles and Di. Now it's back (with Volume I of a five-book set), as funny as ever and annotated. --Time Magazine

The first volume of IDW's "Bloom County: The Complete Library" collects all the strips--every last single one, including many that haven't been reprinted before--from the debut strip in December 1980 through September 1982. It's the best collected edition volume of a comic strip that I've seen to date. The book is unbelievably well put together, from editorial to the physical object, itself.

And it's only \$40. Maybe that's because the majority of the book is in black and white, but I would have thought that a nearly 300 page hardcover bound on the side with the heaviest weight paper I've seen on a comic-related publication would be more expensive than that. I'm very happy that they managed to keep the price so reasonable.

Besides all the strips, there's a healthy introduction to the volume, led by a foreword from the strip's creator, Berkeley Breathed, who recounts the harrowing tales of flying to his editors while finishing inking the strip in the air, to the reason why he thinks the strip found popularity early on. That's just the first two pages. There follows a three page background piece by series editors Dean Mullaney and Bruce Canwell, that places the strip in the context of its time period. You even get samples of Breathed's college strip that led to "Bloom County." Steve Dallas is the star, though it's a completely different strip. Some of the gags seen here are mined for "Bloom County" gags later in the volume, though, and they're kind enough to point those out to you.

The strips are annotated sparingly. "Bloom County" has a large number of then-current pop cultural references in it. Many, I'm sure, seem like antiquated notions to today's kids. Many may have been over the heads of the kids reading the strips in the first place back in 1980/1981/1982. But there they are, explained in a short paragraph next to the strip. Early references include Betty Crocker, the Selective Service, Bella Abzug, and J. Edgar Hoover. Even better, Breathed appears (though even less frequently) in italicized text to give extra thoughts on some strips. This is one failing of other such comic strip reprint projects. The creators are either no longer with us, or just unwilling to contribute as much as Breathed has to this particular project. I was happy that I didn't really need any of those annotations as I read through them now. I guess I read them just to see what they thought was the most basic information needed to explain something to a younger reader.

The strips are presented three to a page, stacked close together, leaving all that white space in the margins for more commentary. The paper stock is solid white, and not thin. Nothing bleeds through in this book, not even the color Sundays. I initially thought the book had twice as many pages as it does, and that's due strictly to the heavier paper stock they used. It's great stuff. Some random strips look a little coarse, but that's due to the lack of a pristine original to shoot from. Trust me; it's not distracting. You'll notice it, but you'll be enjoying the strips too much to balk at those muddier images.

It really is like reading a new comic strip for me, though. Twenty years of maturity since the strip ended means that I can understand Steve Dallas to be a cad and a womanizer in a way other than oafishly charming. The characters often spout philosophical bits of wisdom that wouldn't have struck me as a kid, but that feel truthful and incisive to me today. "Bloom County" is about more than a talking penguin and a weird cat. In this first volume, we're just seeing the author finding that voice.

I can't wait to see more of it come into sharper focus. Five volumes in total are planned, so we've got lots of great reading ahead of us. --Comicbookresources.com

As Berke Breathed says in the notes to this book, he didn't have a clue what Bloom County was going to be about. It was a place, he was filling it with characters, he could go off on whatever tangent he fancied. A strip about kids, about lawyers, about the elderly, about politicians, about monarchs, about penguins, about Ronald Reagan's America.. It took the Doonesbury format of a vast cast of characters with a central base and took it to the horizon. Bloom County could be about anything, and it frequently was.

But mostly about penguins.

Not at the beginning, of course, this first volume of Bloom County, covering three years of strips from 1980 to 1982, including the pre-Bloom County trial runs. And the ornate approach of IDW to the work juxtaposes with the incredibly rough early strips, and indeed some the published strips that have only been recovered from crumpled photocopies and indeed indeed some of the strips that were inked in the aisle seat of the plane as Berke hand delivered them across the country to hit a syndication deadline. His Opus for a decent scanner and broadband back in 1981, I'm sure...

The book emphasises just how unlikely such a collection as this was when being created - it's a topical strip, so the margins are full of notes explaining stories in the news and the relevance of people mentioned - often an entire gag rests on a non sequitor name, and you have to wait for the notes to have any hope of getting it, which can make for a different reading experience. But the strip does suit being collected like this, getting a month of Bloom in a single sitting does give a real sense of a location inside Berke Breathed's head, explored in linear fashion. Some of the jokes really don't work, but they don't need to when they're part of a richer tapestry.

And IDW have ensured that the tapestry is very rich indeed. Hardback, silk bookmark, thick paper, lush printing and colour, lots of behind the scenes gubbins, extras and restored jokes from when they were censored during publication. Get ready to make more space on your bookshelf. --bleedingcool.com

#### About the Author

Berkeley Breathed lives and works in Santa Barbara, California and is the proud owner of a gentle pit bull named Ridley, a deaf dachshund named Milly, and a refugee mutt from the Puerto Rican streets named Pilar--splendidly flawed dogs, every one.

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