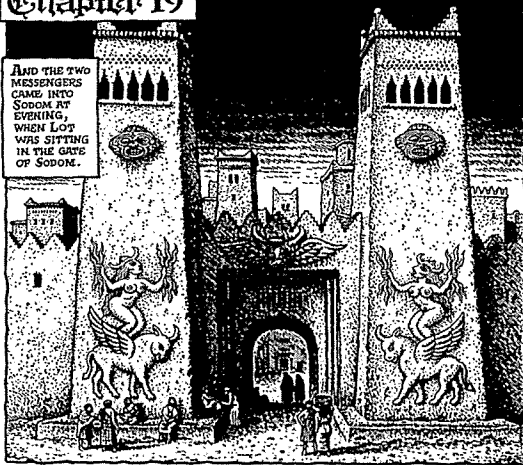


Chapter 19

AND THE TWO MESSENGERS CAME INTO SODOM AT EVENING, WHEN LOT WAS SITTING IN THE GATE OF SODOM.



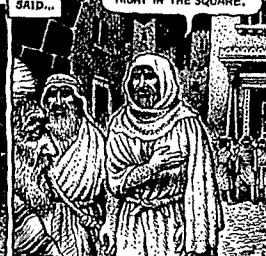
AND LOT SAW, AND HE ROSE TO GREET THEM, AND BOWED WITH HIS FACE TO THE GROUND.

AND THEY SAID...

NO, WE'LL SPEND THE NIGHT IN THE SQUARE.



O, PLEASE, MY LORDS, TURN ASIDE TO YOUR SERVANT'S HOUSE AND BATHE YOUR FEET, AND YOU CAN RISE EARLY AND SET OFF ON YOUR WAY!



COURTESY COLUMBUS MUSEUM OF ART

From Eden to Egypt:

R. CRUMB'S BOOK OF GENESIS

BY LIA EASTEP

If you grew up attending Sunday school, you might fondly remember the perforated handouts featuring the Bible's greatest hits awash in pastel illustrations. If you went on to teach Sunday school as an adult, you may have found yourself disturbed to discover just how lurid and violent many of those stories really are.

A new exhibition at the Columbus Museum of Art, *The Bible Illuminated: R. Crumb's Book of Genesis*, may be just the thing to reconcile these conflicting reactions.

The panels at the entrance of the exhibition call out to the viewer like an old-school comic or freak show advertisement: *The first book of the bible graphically depicted! All 50 chapters! Nothing left out! Adult Supervision Recommended for Minors.* For those unfamiliar with Crumb's work, this is a fair warning. For those who know him as the subversive founder of underground comics, whose jokey *Keep On Trucking* and *Felix the Cat* comics gave way to the scatological and pornographic themes that characterized his later work, the style is familiar.

In a 2009 interview on NPR's "All Things Considered," Crumb explained the impetus of his project. His initial plan was to just illustrate the story of Adam and Eve. But he became so enthralled with the possibilities

of the entire book of Genesis, that he spent the next five years working on it, creating great anticipation among his fans.

The completed project contains 207 pages, and all are on display, covering the walls of four rooms of the CMA. Walking through the exhibition, I was first struck by the massive amount of text. Crumb was faithful, incorporating every single word (including the tedious lineage listings, known as "the begots") of the first book of the Bible. While often bawdy and garish, Crumb's illustration job is not satirical. God is portrayed in familiar strokes: a severe, patriarchal figure with a massive beard, who continually loses patience with the human race. The humans are thick, with almost Neanderthal features, but their surroundings are familiar and their behaviors relatable.

It was easy to get sucked into the drama of the stories, and easy to forget how many came from one book. I expected to see the creation story, Adam and Eve, Cain and Able, Noah's Ark, and Abraham's test. But I'd forgotten about Sodom and Gomorrah, the Tower of Babel, the banishment of Ishmael, life in the Land of Canaan, Joseph's famous coat, and Jacob wrestling with God. Even the lesser-known tales like Jacob's love triangle with sisters Rachel and Leah, and Onan's obligation to sleep with his dead brother's widow, are filled with intrigue worthy of a



1980s soap opera or current day reality show.

But it is the sheer scope of the project and Crumb's careful attention to detail that is likely to impress a broad range of audiences and leave a lasting impact. ■

R. Crumb's *Book of Genesis* is on display at the Columbus Museum of Art until January 16, 2011. For more information, visit www.columbusmuseum.org.