



Astro City, Vol. 2: Confession

Kurt Busiek, Alex Ross, Brent Anderson, Neil Gaiman (Introduction)

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The second Astro City volume collects the first extended storyline from the award-winning comics series as a young man struggles to earn his place as sidekick to the forbidding hero known as the Confessor, only to learn that his hero holds a dark secret.

Astro City, Vol. 2: Confession Details

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From Reader Review Astro City, Vol. 2: Confession for online ebook

Dan Schwent says

When Brian King goes to Astro City to become a hero, he falls under the wing of The Confessor. But what is the Confessor's secret? Who is killing people on Shadow Hill? And why is Astro City turning against the very heroes that protect it? That's what Brian, The Altar Boy, means to find out...

After loving the first volume, I knew I was in for the long haul. Fortunately, I was able to find Astro City volume 2 on eBay for less than an arm and a leg. How the hell is part of this series out of print?

Anyway, the second volume of Astro City is more focused than the first. A single character is used as the point of view character. Brian King heads to the big city to make a difference and quickly finds himself working for The Confessor. The Confessor molds Brian into a detective, just as the relationship between Astro City and its heroes becomes toxic.

While the story is about super heroes and an alien invasion on the surface, it's really about how easy it is for public opinion to shift and for people to become nasty. When the mayor outlaws super heroes, things get ugly in a hurry. Parts of it felt like Marvel's Civil War event ten years before the event.

Using the powerless Altar Boy as the point of view character worked really well. He was a super hero but still enough of an outsider to make it work. The origin of the Confessor was great, although Wizard spoiled it not long after the storyline concluded back in the day. The truth behind why the city turned on the super heroes made a hell of a lot more sense than Marvel's Civil War at any rate.

While you can feel the reverence Kurt Busiek and company have for the whole concept of super heroes, it doesn't feel like they're constrained by the concept. Focusing on the humans in the middle of the super hero conflicts gives the stories a much more personal touch.

As I said when I read Astro City, Vol. 1: Life in the Big City, I didn't really get Astro City when it first came out. Now, a couple decades later, I totally get it. The best super hero stories are the ones that aren't hamstrung by decades of continuity and aren't forced to maintain the status quo: Watchmen, The Dark Knight Returns, and later Astro City. Five out of five stars.

Patrick says

While the first trade collection of Astro City is marvelous. This second book is actually even better, telling an entire contiguous story instead of a series of (excellent) shorter stories.

You could conceivably start reading the series here without much missing context or confusion. But the continuity purest in me will always encourage you to start from the beginning. The entire series is brilliant, so why deny yourself any part of that experience?

Sesana says

An Astro City story in more than two parts! So far, everything that I'd read of Astro City had been, essentially, short stories. And there was no lack of ambition in plotting this. It's a novel take on Batman, in many ways, and on Marvel's tendency for the normal human population to cycle between outright adoration of their heroes and witch hunts. And there's an alien invasion. It's a lot, but it's managed well. If I were working in Marvel editorial, I'd be embarrassed that Busiek wrote a Civil War-style story years before they got around to it, and did it so much better. I also like that I can see Astro City unfolding into a place that feels real, that has its own sense of history. It feels like there's been a lot of groundwork done just on the history of the place, things we might never see in full but are there anyways. And maybe we will see it, and I look forward to that.

After the Confessor and Altar Boy story, there's one short story, *The Nearness of You*. Well worth the read, it's hauntingly lovely, about a battle that never was and the forgotten, human collateral damage. It seems it was nominated for an Eisner that year, and it earned it.

Sophie says

This was really, really good.

I picked this up after seeing it recommended somewhere, and I'm glad that I didn't read the excerpts back then, because I'm pretty sure that would have spoiled it for me.

Like Neil Gaiman writes in his introduction - things can mean more than they literally mean, and that is when what we like to call art happens. Taken at face value alone, *Confession* is already a good story. But because it means more than it literally means, it's a great story. And like all great stories, it involves Batman. (I'm kidding. Maybe.)

I don't want to say too much here in order not to spoil anything, but let me just say that among the many things this story does is summing up what Batman is about. (Better than a lot of stories that actually involve Batman, in my opinion.) It's also a great story about a boy coming to a big city hoping to fulfill his dreams. And there's more, and if all that isn't enough, there's another story at the end of this book which isn't connected to rest at all and which is just very, very beautiful and heartbreakingly. So if you like that sort of thing, do read this.

Finally, I just want to add that this can be read even if you don't know anything about Astro City at all. You can trust me on this, because I didn't know anything about it either. I definitely want to read more, though.

Jan Philipzig says

Apart from a cheesy coming-of-age story, *Astro City Vol.2: Confession* does not add much to the old, worn-out formula: evil alien with a sinister hidden agenda masquerades as one of us, tries to turn us against our benevolent protectors. Professionally done by everyone involved, but lacking the originality and brilliant touches of the first volume. Seriously overrated.

Shelly says

I adore Astro City. I read the first volume, then picked up the current ongoing series with the first Vertigo issue, and have slowly been reading the trade collections in between. This is the second volume and it's about as perfect as a superhero tale can get, starting with the introduction Neil Gaiman wrote for the volume. The first 6 issues are one story, an origin story of Confessor and the youth who travels to Astro City to meet the heroes and become someone important. Along the way, his smarts and tenacity earn him a position as Altar Boy, the Confessor's sidekick. But it's not just fighting crime that Confessor teaches young Brian; there are life lessons, too, and over the course of the story, Brian learns a lot about what it means to be a hero and what it means to really matter. There's a lot about mob paranoia and fear mongering that fits as well with things going on in the world in 2016 as when the story was published in the 1990s. There's a nifty short story about lost love that's included and which brought some moisture to my eyes. Sketches and a cover gallery fill up the back pages.

Sarah says

I can't believe how everything in this story came together. I finished it two days ago, and I'm still marveling at the fact that Busiek was able to combine vampirism, alien invasion, superhuman registration, serial killings and summer mob violence into a Batman analog. Take that, Civil War and Secret Invasion! Image Comics did it first!

Initially, I was so in love with the short story format Busiek introduced in "Life in the Big City," that I didn't want to trust a longer plot line, especially since it involved the creation of a sidekick for The Confessor, a quasi-religious figurehead of terror. But I shouldn't have worried. Busiek blessed even that mysterious man with a gentle humanity that Batman has been devoid of since the 1980s. And his sidekick, Altar Boy, had a believably hot temper that would turn him to seeking fame and recognition, even as he keeps his identity a secret. And of course, those are ridiculous names for superheroes, so a little bit of fun can always be had in that.

So many themes are crammed into this volume about detective work and the true nature of Samaritan acts. It draws from all sorts of Batman lore and the caring yet bounded relationship established between the two partners allows for greater understanding of a hero's psyche reacting just as an ordinary citizen's. Again, the art work is top-notch and the character development wholly satisfying and redeeming of anyone trying to make a place for themselves in this life.

Richard says

While the first volume of Astro City was structured as an anthology of different stories each issue, this volume goes in a different direction and focuses solely on one protagonist, telling the story of Brian Kinney, a bright-eyed young man who comes to Astro City with dreams of rubbing shoulders with superheroes. He gets more than he bargained for when he becomes Altar Boy, the sidekick of the city's mysterious vigilante of the night, the Confessor. The events that follow challenge Brian's every romantic notion of being a hero, revealing everything from its lack of glamour to the shifty and unstable relationship between the vigilantes

and the public they serve.

The classic superhero sidekick has always been a convention steeped in marketing and pandering, but Busiek uses it here to start a conversation about responsibility and distrust, while showing us why sidekicks can actually be important and essential. *Astro City*'s first volume was good but this one has already taken the series to a new height.

"In the final judgement what is more important? The burdens we bear, or the way we bear them?"

Eric says

For the first arc of *Astro City*, Kurt Busiek, Brent Anderson, and Alex Ross (with the inking of Will Blyberg, the coloring of Alex Sinclair, and the lettering of John Roshell) tackled one of the oldest, cheesiest, and obviously commercial staples of superhero comics: the teenage sidekick. And what better way to explore the teenage sidekick than by riffing off of the oldest and most well-known teenage sidekick in the world, and his even more iconic mentor?

Brian Kinney is Altar Boy, the newly minted sidekick of *Astro City*'s most enigmatic and vigilant defender The Confessor. The silly name and the lame costume aren't what he envisioned for himself when he chose to move to *Astro City* and follow his goal of becoming a hero lauded with praise, glory, and respect from the masses, but at least he's *somebody*. Not like his deceased father, who's kindness and generosity was taken advantage of in their small town community while he lived and was spoken of with mockery and criticism after he died. But there's a growing current of doubt, fear, and animosity directed towards the heroes of *Astro City* this record-hot summer. Ritual murders are going unsolved in the Shadow Hill part of the city, despite the best efforts of law enforcement and the superhero community. And when the mayor of *Astro City* posits that an unknown superhuman must be behind the Shadow Hill murders he proposes a superhero registration that further inflames the tension and widens the divide between the superheroes and their supporters, and government forces and paranoid citizens that expands throughout the country, to the delight of a nefarious force.

I don't know how but in 6 issues Busiek told a heartfelt coming-of-age tale that raises the teenage sidekick above its blatantly commercial purpose and celebrates the appeal and virtues behind the archetype, making it clear why the teenage sidekick has been almost as long-lasting as the superhero itself. Not just that, but he also wrote a compelling sub-plot about distrust and conflict between the government (local and federal) and costumed vigilantes that's better thought-out and better executed than any similar story line done by DC and Marvel since the arc was completed in 1997. And hell, I'll even call *Astro City: Confession* one of the best Batman and Robin stories ever told, even though Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson (and Jason Todd, Tim Drake, and Damian Wayne) are nowhere in sight.

Or, as Neil Gaiman simply puts it at the end of his excellent introduction to this volume, *"Astro City, in the hands of Kurt Busiek and his collaborators, is art, and it is good art. It recognizes the strengths of the four-colour heroes, and it creates something - a place, perhaps, or a medium, or just a tone - in which good stories are told. There is room for things to mean more than they literally mean, and this is certainly true in*

Astro City."

4 1/4 stars

Danielle The Book Huntress (Back to the Books) says

Confession takes the Astro City series to the next level with this story of a young man who comes to the big city to make his name and becomes the sidekick of the mysterious superhero Confessor. The drawing and coloring was gorgeous and vivid. It seemed to almost leap off the page at me. I think this volume was more emotional and much darker than *Life in the Big City*.

This reminded me a lot of *Batman*, which may or may not be intentional. I felt like the young boy was both a *Batman* in the making and *Robin* at the same time. He has his share of anger at this father's passing and the way he feels that his dad failed him. And an anger at bullies and the unjust. While *Bruce Wayne* was more angry at the criminal who murdered his parents, I think he also resented his parents for leaving him, for putting their philanthropy before him. In the *Robin* parallel, he takes on a mentor who is mysterious and driven, who inspires his loyalty the hard way. And from whom, he takes on a mantle and continues his legacy.

Some aspects of this novel hit home very closely. It deals with suspicion and prejudice, and the injustice that seems so intrinsic to a society. How people use ridiculous reasons to hate each other, and that allows deep injustice to occur in the world, often right under their prejudiced noses. The fact that being a hero rarely pays off materially, but requires an unflinching commitment, often at the risk of personal endangerment, and dealing with the fact that your work is often goes unacknowledged and the public opinion can change in an instant.

While *Life in the Big City* is a more upbeat, bright view of superheroes, this is superheroes in the dark. There are moments that hit me hard, and I had to go back and double check that I had read the former panel right. And I was sad to see my understanding was correct.

I think this is a seminal graphic novel work for superhero fans. Maybe I don't get an opinion (because I haven't read as many GNs as others), but that's how I feel. It shows the truth of the nitty gritty of being a superhero, and the narrator (the young man) is like a stand-in for all of us readers who were in awe of the various superheroes growing up (and even now as grown up geeks). We can see that it's not all it's cracked up to be. The first volume also showed this, but I still think it was more of a 50s style, everything is bright version of that. This is the version in which all the illusions are ripped away and you see the unvarnished truth.

This is a strong graphic novel and it deserves a high rating. I think if I wasn't in such a persistent reading slump, it might have been a five star book. It caught me at a less than ideal time, so I'm going to give it a **4.25/5.0 stars**.

Shannon Appelcline says

Busiek's first *Astro City* epic is an intriguing one, because he deftly threads together several major plotlines, then he subverts it all by largely summarizing the ending. If anything, the result feels *more* epic but simultaneously it allows him to cast a strong spotlight on the characters at the center of the storyline: the Confessor and Altar Boy. And, it's a great character study that had me desperately wanting to see more of the characters for years afterward.

I think that the storyline doesn't hold up to rereading as well as some of the other *Astro City* volumes because it's so heavy on mystery and revelation, but it's still brilliantly put together for a first-time read.

The short story that ends the volume, "The Nearness of You", may be one of Busiek's best *Astro City* stories ever. The last pages always fill my eyes with tears. Very deserving in its Eisner nomination.

William Thomas says

There have been few books, few works of art, few pieces of music that I've experienced and felt resonate way down deep in my bones. It isn't often that something comes along and immerses my entire being in it, so perfect that it feels like I am living it. The first time I heard Black Sabbath's "Iron Man". The first time I saw Pantera live at Ozzfest 98. The first time I saw Francis Bacon's "Figure with Meat" at the Art Institute in Chicago. When I first read Fante's 'Ask the Dust'. A few others here and there, but there aren't many milestones like that. Things that changed my perception one way or another, things that made me feel alive both literally and figuratively, feelings that can barely be explained.

Astro City is now one of those experiences. It's sad it took me so long to get around to it, that I just shrugged it off when it hit the stands way back when in 96. I let a completely biased opinion of Busiek's work from the Big2 get the better of my judgement. Sigh.

But now as I'm plowing through every single volume he's printed, it just keeps getting better. "Confession" is head and shoulders above the first volume, if you can believe it. A truly linear story that echoes once again Golden Age story-telling and artwork and encapsulates everything good about the art form, America's greatest art form (again, sorry Jazz). It has heart, it's supremely human, it is bold and imaginative and a pure delight to read. It gives me the kind of feeling that reading my very first comics gave me. And it pulls so tenderly at my heart strings that it's hard not to let nostalgia overwhelm me.

This is modern literature at its finest. It's comic books at their best. It's perfection.

Writing: A+

Art: A

Brenda Clough says

Oh, this is superb. In his *ASTRO CITY* work, Busiek shows what can really be done with the superhero. I have a particular weakness for secret identities, Batman-and-Robin analogues, and plot twists, so this graphic novel is bliss.

The story is narrated by Brian Kinney, AKA Altar Boy, a superhero sidekick and one of the most delightful youngsters in the trade. His mentor, The Confessor, is a fascinating and conflicted figure (see if you can spot

his first appearance, at the private party in the first story) whose secrets I will not spoil for you. Let young Brian take you on the tour.

This one stands perfectly well alone and is a fine place to begin if you want to try out the modern graphic novel.

James DeSantis says

This was pretty damn good. A more focused story on one main character and his life as a sidekick looking into the world of superheroes.

So there's a murder. Then another. And another. It keeps going and going and now it's caught national attention. At the time that is happening a new kid, nicknamed alter boy, joins the Confession! Together they begin to work together. Think of it like Batman and Robin. By the time they make a name for themselves this murdering of young people has gone on long enough and the city can't stand it anymore. They want answers. The mayor begins to blame Superheroes for not helping and BAM it's starting a war between regular beings and superheroes.

Good: It amazes me this is early 1990's because the art is freaking great. I also really love Alterboys inner thoughts. The way he couldn't figure out what was right and wrong, his past with his father, trying to trust his mentor, and trying to do what he thinks it's good. Not to mention the overarching themes and plotting is all top notch. This was engrossing, well done, and well paced.

Bad: The last story is kind of out of nowhere, and boring. It doesn't do anything to add to the rest of this story.

Overall I loved this for 90% of it. There's a few lulls and the last issue is kind of a pointless issue but still solid shit. I'm going with a 4 out of 5 for this awesome volume.

mark monday says

I Confess, when flipping through the pages and seeing a Batman-like superhero named The Confessor who dresses like a sinister priest and has strange hypnotic powers and a resentful Robin-like sidekick named Altar Boy... the whole thing looked so goofy at first glance. but it's not! it is marvelous. smart and sweet and emotional and surprising and a whole lot of fun.

I Confess, when I first saw the familiar Astro City narrative start again - a newcomer to Astro City is dazzled by all the amazing things - I thought that maybe the template would create tedium. but I was wrong! this is the first actual story arc in the series: six juicy episodes full of boy coming of age, mysterious dark mentor, a superhero registry created by a reactionary mayor, a serial killer, vampires, shapeshifters, and an alien invasion. the scale is widescreen and epic but as usual the story itself is intimate and quite moving.

I Confess: an underrated film by Alfred Hitchcock starring Montgomery Clift, Quebec City, and many shots of Monty walking about, deep in thought. just thought I'd throw that in.

I Confess, I almost forgot to read the final standalone story. what a mistake that would have been! "The

"Nearness of You" is sad and lovely, a story about time gone awry, a strange love, the eerie hero The Hanged Man recounting a great battle that never was. it was nominated for an Eisner, deservedly.

I Confess, I read the introduction by my hero Neil Gaiman last. I was afraid of spoilers. but it is a great intro and I should have read it first! here's Gaiman on Astro City:

"Astro City is what would have happened if those old comics, with their fine simplicities and their primal, four-colour characters, had been about something. Or rather, it assumes they were about something, and tells you the tales that, on the whole, slipped through the cracks."
