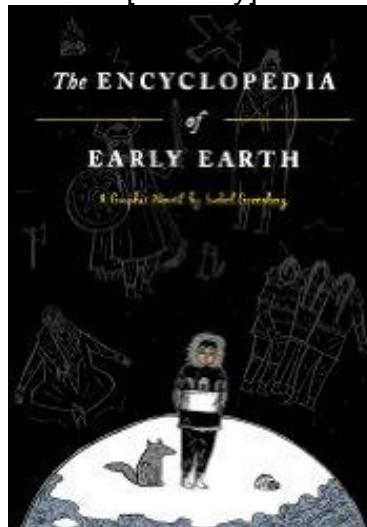




The Encyclopedia of Early Earth by Isabel Greenberg

[Fantasy]



In the beginning there was a girl and a boy and they loved each other very much. She lived at the South Pole, and he came from the North, but they do say that opposites attract...

Due to an inexplicable quirk of physics, however, they found that they couldn't touch. Even the Shaman of the South couldn't explain it, but the girl believed so profoundly that the power of their love *would* conquer all that they married. Every night they slept together, but remember: *they could not touch*. So in the morning, to feel each others' body warmth, they swapped sides.

Have you ever read anything more romantic in your life? Greenberg draws a ghost of the couple holding each other through the gulf of their separately sleeping selves. It's all right if you want to cry.

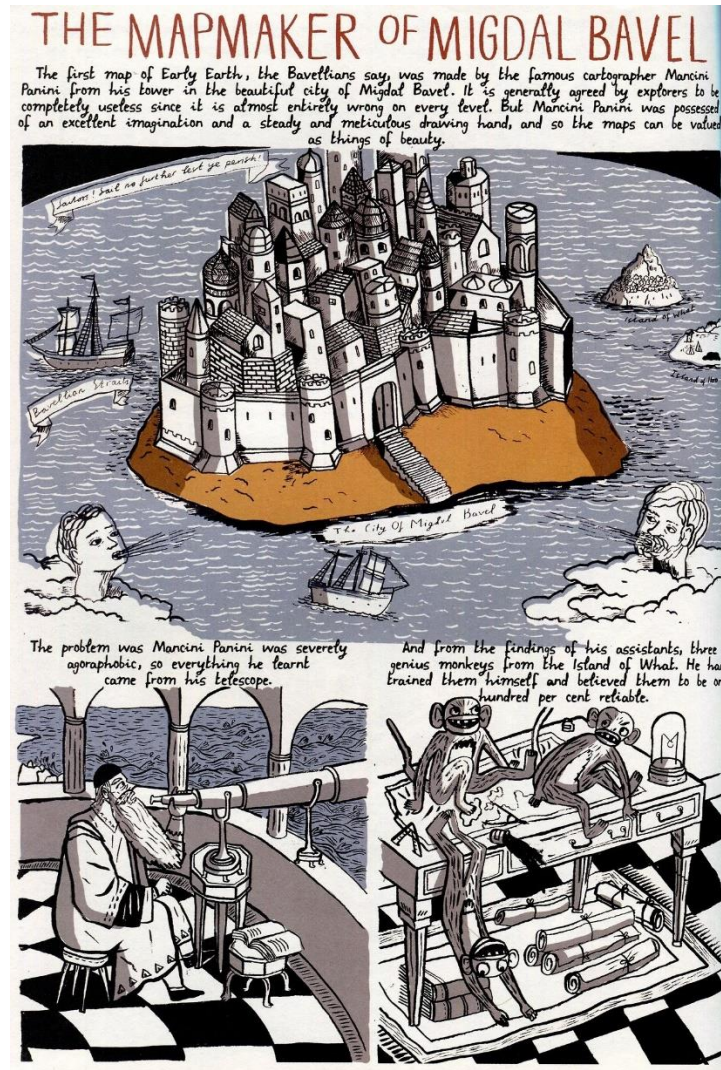
"They spent hours staring into each other's eyes. And yet still they could not so much as brush fingertips." So instead to keep each other warm they tell stories. And *this...* is the story... he *tells...*

LOVE IN A VERY COLD CLIMATE



Within you will learn how the boy of the North came to the South, how this world came to be in such an egregiously sorry state; and how the couple's cruel division *was absolutely no quirk of physics*. Someone up above has been messing around!

The irony of it all is that the two genuine lovers find themselves if not poles apart then at least a good foot or two, whereas much of what follows involves rival siblings who should love each other dearly causing conflict through competition. Kid and Kiddo are the funniest. They're the children of the Eagle god who forbids them to interfere with mortals yet takes great delight in the plight of two brothers which won't end well at all for them, or an entire population for hundreds of years to come.



"We can have some fun with this" says the Eagle God, staring down at the world through his scrying pool which happens to be one of several bathtubs.

It's all so deliriously absurd, like the agoraphobic Mapmaker who entrusts his cartography to monkeys. Greenberg takes great delight in puncturing the solemnity of her epic storytelling with modern mischief, as when the Nords are invaded by pillaging, helmeted Strangers who high-five each other... "Lads, lads, lads! Waaaay!" ... before being repelled... "Oh bloody Hell! Run, lads!"

The art is a joy, harking back to the early days of the printing press when naturalistic perspective had either been lost or abandoned and figures were more representational. The landscapes here are bursting with folklore character and the quality cream stock does it full justice. Also, I am big fan of water and there is water everywhere, either in inky darkness or washed in blue with some of the most beautiful ripples I have ever seen. Overwhelmingly Greenberg goes light on the colours so that when they're deployed in deepest scarlet or a light, cornfield yellow they make their presence felt.

In summary: epic journeys, vast struggles, gods interfering with mortals. Some tall tales provide currency, others prove life-savers. Every one is told with such charm, humour and authority that I believed them all! Even those about Kid and Kiddo who, inadvertently, created the world we all live in: "We're so awesome I basically can't cope!"

You wait until Dad finds out.

And then, drenched in his blood, she dragged it, step by arduous step, back to the village.



The Old Lady never made the walk. She settled down to a comfortable retirement, being waited on hand and foot and regaling all who would listen with the tales of her adventures. In fact she is still alive to this day. You have guessed of course, it is none other than the Wise Old Crone.



Also recommended by Isabel Greenberg:

THE ONE HUNDRED NIGHTS OF HERO is about stories and storytelling; of sisterhood and story spreading; of love, loyalty, disloyalty and loss; and – though laced with bubble-bursting comedy – a damning indictment of women's treatment at the hands of men through the ages under a possession-based patriarchy which organised religion has played no small part in underpinning and enforcing.