

Book Review

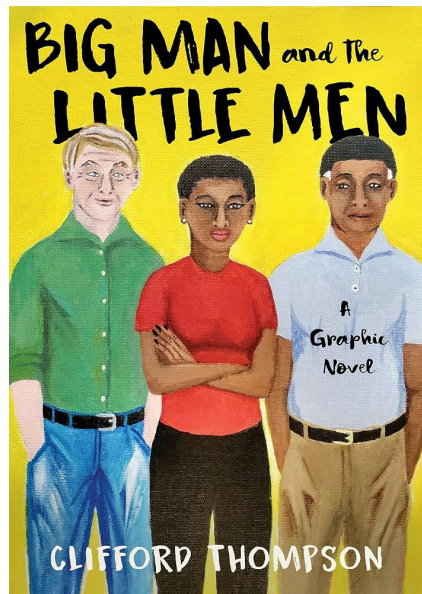
Big Man and the Little Men by Clifford Thompson

Reviewed by Alexis Wall

When exposure risks greater harm, who determines the moral hierarchy of truth? Clifford Thompson's *Big Man and the Little Men* is a thought-provoking hybrid, part political thriller, part ethical inquiry, that uses the graphic novel form to test the limits of integrity. At the center of the story is April Wells, a Black memoirist and journalist whose integrity is tested when she is assigned to cover a charismatic Democratic presidential candidate whose rhetoric of hope begins to fracture when allegations of sexual misconduct surface. April faces an impossible choice: to publish the story and risk handing victory to the far-right opponent, or to suppress

it and compromise her own ethics. This tension between personal conscience and collective consequence drives the book's emotional core. Thompson doesn't offer moral clarity; instead, he situates readers in April's uncertainty, her private negotiations with guilt, fear, and self-preservation. He forces us to question whether the ends can ever justify the means.

Thompson, an essayist and visual artist known for exploring race and



morality in American life, turns to sequential art to expand his moral vocabulary. What makes *Big Man and the Little Men* so distinctive is Thompson's choice of form. By choosing a graphic novel format, he transforms the reading into an immersive experience instead of relying on prose to deliver this ethically charged story. In a sense, Thompson's story is also a provocation to the industry's old hierarchy that treats text-heavy nonfiction as the primary vessel for "serious" ideas. The graphic form would appeal to readers who might never pick up a media ethics monograph. The illustrated panels slow down the perception so we don't just follow events, we witness them. The reader becomes an observer and accomplice, implicated in every decision April makes. Every pause, every shift in angle, and every trace of silence holds meaning. The form itself becomes a kind of ethical mirror, asking readers to consider what we see, what we overlook, and how easily narrative can be shaped by framing.

The story's symmetry also deserves praise. Thompson builds a subtle balance between beginning and end, where mirrored panels and recurring motifs reinforce the cyclical nature of truth and consequence. The final panel, in particular, delivers a striking sense of closure. One that may leave readers gasping at the quiet but powerful realization it conveys. It's an ending that lingers, forcing reflection long after the book is closed.

From an ethical-publishing perspective, *Big Man and the Little Men* is an act of formal resistance. It challenges the notion that weighty topics must be confined to prose essays or policy writing, demonstrating that visual narrative can hold moral gravitas. The choice of medium also democratizes access to philosophical reflection, reaching audiences who might not engage with academic treatments of media ethics or political corruption.

That said, I occasionally found myself wanting more emotional depth in the visual storytelling. Some sequences rely heavily on dialogue where silence or visual tension could have spoken louder. Those moments left me wishing the art had been allowed to carry more of the moral weight. Additionally, the book's dialogue occasionally leans too heavily on exposition, which can blunt emotional immediacy. Some conversations spell out ethical ideas that the visuals already communicate effectively. Ultimately, Thompson reminds us that in both politics and publishing, integrity is not a possession but a practice tested every time we choose what story to tell and how to tell it. *Big Man and the Little Men* is not just a story about media and politics, but a meditation on the cost of integrity in an era when truth itself is negotiable.