**LOVE AND ROCKETS**

**Author:** Hernandez, Gilbert; Hernandez, Jaime; Hernandez, Mario

**Artist:** Gilbert Hernandez (illustrator); Jaime Hernandez (illustrator); Mario Hernandez (illustrator); Jeff Johnson (colorist); Rhea Patton (colorist); Chris Brownrigg (colorist); Steven Weissman (colorist)

**Publisher:** Fantagraphics Books

**First serial publication:** 1982-1996; 2001-2007; 2008-

**First book publication:** 1985-

**Publication History**

Soon after brothers Mario, Gilbert, and Jaime Hernandez self-published their first issue of *Love and Rockets* in 1981, it caught the eye of Fantagraphics publisher Gary Groth. In 1982, Groth republished the inaugural issue; the first series of *Love and Rockets* ran for fifty issues, ending in 1996. All issues in the original volume were magazine-size, and the comics were black and white. The art duties for the color covers alternated between Gilbert and Jaime; one would draw the front cover and the other the back cover, then switching responsibilities for the following issue.

After the end of the first series, Jaime and Gilbert began working on separate titles that continued many of the stories in the original *Love and Rockets*. In 2001, the brothers began their second series of *Love and Rockets*, which ran for twenty issues, until 2007. Although these issues were smaller than the originals, they nonetheless retained a similar format: color covers illustrated by Jaime and Gilbert and black-and-white content written and illustrated by all three brothers.

In 2008, the Hernandez brothers returned with a third manifestation of their comic series. The new series, *Love and Rockets: New Stories*, was still in black and white, but the publication size changed again; the comic was published as an annual and in a graphic novel format of about a hundred pages.

Since the mid-1980’s, *Love and Rockets* issues have been collected and repackaged in three primary formats: the early *Complete Love and Rockets* series, large omnibus collections, and *Love and Rockets* Library editions.

**Plot**

*Love and Rockets* contains a variety of narrative arcs, many of which have convoluted plots. The two primary stories, however, concern the associations of the “Locas,” Maggie and Hopey (Jaime’s comics), and those of Luba, her extended family, and the fictional Central American town of Palomar (Gilbert’s comics).

In “Mechanics,” Maggie, a mechanic, goes with her group of prosolar mechanics to a South American town to repair a rocket. While there, they get caught up in a political revolution.

“*The Death of Speedy Oritz*” is a story of romantic entanglements, focusing primarily on the Maggie’s personal relationships. Ray Dominguez likes Maggie but assumes incorrectly that Speedy is involved with
her. Speedy professes his love for Maggie, which she cannot handle; he apparently commits suicide.

“Flies on the Ceiling” is a short but significant story, in which Izzy has a nervous breakdown while in Mexico. She becomes involved with a man and his young son, but because she is haunted by her past, she decides to return to Huerta (or Hoppers, as the barrio is called).

“Wigwam Bam” is a complex, sustained narrative and one of Jaime’s most ambitious. It begins when Maggie and Hopey are on the East Coast at a party. Angry for being mocked as a “Mexican” and for Hopey’s indifference to this slight, Maggie leaves the party and temporarily runs away from her past. The rest of the story focuses on the relationships of Hopey and the Hoppers crowd. During this time, Izzy searches for the two friends.

In “Ghost of Hoppers,” Maggie is back on the West Coast, divorced and managing an apartment complex. Although still in an off-and-on relationship with Hopey, she meets the seductive Vivian Solis and travels with Vivian to her native barrio, Hoppers. There, she undergoes a surreal experience and witnesses the burning of Izzy’s house.
With “Tri-Girls Adventures Number 34,” Jaime revisits the mock superhero genre that he explored in some of his earlier comics. In it, Maggie’s friend, Angel Rivera, teams up with several superpowered women to battle another female team and help subdue the renegade Penny Century.

“Heartbreak Soup” is Gilbert’s first sustained story of Palomar and its citizens. It involves the entrepreneur Pipo’s ill-fated relationship with the philandering Manuel and establishes the rivalry between Luba and Chelo.

In “An American in Palomar,” Howard, an American photojournalist, visits the small town for his new book. Although many citizens believe that he is there to appreciate them, he stereotypes the townspeople and exploits them merely to further his own career.

“Human Diastrophism” is a long serialized narrative involving the arrival of a serial killer in Palomar. As the townspeople and Sheriff Chelo try to solve the mystery, Luba takes up with her former lover, Khamo, and the young artist Humberto inadvertently discovers the murderer’s identity.

“Poison River” is perhaps Gilbert’s most ambitious narrative arc. It relates Luba’s long, convoluted backstory from the early days of Luba’s broken family into her marriage at a young age to Pedro and through the many twists of her husband’s criminal connections and her own drug habits. Along the way, Luba has a miscarriage, escapes from her doomed marriage, reunites with her cousin Ofelia, gives birth to her first daughter, flees military conflicts, and ends up on the outskirts of Palomar.

“Love and Rockets X” is a highly condensed story with a large cast of characters. Set in Los Angeles and following the exploits of a garage band named Love and Rockets, the narrative is propelled through a series of conflicts surrounding race, class, sexual orientation, and generational differences.

“High Soft Lisp” is an episodic character portrait of Fritz, Luba’s younger half sister, covering her high school days, adulthood, careers, and relationships and sexual misadventures. This narrative sets up Fritz as the future B-movie star featured in Gilbert’s later non-Love and Rockets graphic novels.

**Volumes**

**Complete Love and Rockets**

• Dicks and Deedees (2003). Collects Love and Rockets Volume 2, issues 4-5, along with Jaime’s solo Penny Century, issues 5-7.
• Luba: Three Daughters (2006). Collects Gilbert’s stories from Love and Rockets Volume 2, issues 6, 11-16; along with Luba’s Comics and Stories, issues 3, 4, 6, and 8; Measles, issue 1; and eleven new stories.
• High Soft Lisp (2010). Collects Love and Rockets Volume 1, issues 3-5, 7-9, 11, 13-15, and 17-18, along with Gilbert’s solo Luba’s Comics and Stories, issue 7.

Omnibus Editions
• Locas II: Maggie, Hopey, and Ray (2009). Collects the Complete Love and Rockets volumes Locas in Love, Dicks and Deedees, Ghost of Hoppers, and The Education of Hopey Glass.

The Love and Rockets Library
• Maggie the Mechanic (2007). Reprints parts of the omnibus Locas: The Maggie and Hopey Stories. Contains the major story lines “Mechanics” and “Las Mujeres Perdidas.”
• Perla La Loca (2007). Reprints parts of the omnibus Locas: The Maggie and Hopey Stories. Contains the major story lines “Wigwam Bam,” “Chester Square,” “Hester Square,” and “Bob Richardson.”
• Beyond Palomar (2007). Collects the Complete Love and Rockets volumes Poison River and Love and Rockets X.
• Esperanza (2011). Collects the Complete Love and Rockets volumes Ghost of Hoppers and The Education of Hopey Glass.

Characters
• Margarita Luisa Chascarrillo, a.k.a. Maggie, has remained a central character during the comic’s entire run. She is Hopey’s best friend and occasional lover. Early in the series she was a mechanic but later works as the manager of an apartment complex. Much of Jaime’s stories revolve around her evolving relationships and battles with her weight and self-esteem.
• Esperanza Leticia Glass, a.k.a. Hopey, is Maggie’s best friend. She is unambiguously lesbian
and becomes involved in a variety of relationships. Once a punk rock bassist with a penchant for trouble, she has matured over the years and now lives a more subdued existence as a teacher’s assistant.

- Ray Dominguez is one of Maggie’s former boyfriends. Although he has been involved with others, his heart always returns to Maggie. Growing up in Hoppers, he travels east to study art, returns to the barrio, and eventually moves to Los Angeles. As the series has developed, he has evolved into the central male figure in Jaime’s female-dominated comics world.

- Beatriz García, a.k.a. Penny Century, is Love and Rockets’ most vivacious and unpredictable character and one of its sexual powerhouses. In contrast to many of Jaime’s other female figures, she is decidedly heterosexual. A close friend to Maggie and Hopey and former wife of billionaire H. R. Costigan, she regularly pops in and out of people’s lives and often masquerades as a female superhero.

- Isabel Ortiz Reubens, a.k.a. Izzy, introduced Maggie and Hopey to each other and is deeply devoted to Maggie. Highly perceptive but subdued and dour, she is haunted by the demons of her past, which include a failed marriage, three abortions, a nervous breakdown, and institutionalization.

- Eulalio Ortiz, a.k.a. Speedy, is Izzy’s younger brother and a gang member in Hopper. He had a crush on Maggie, although he did not reveal his feelings to her until near the end of his life. Maggie harbored similar feelings for him, but by the time she acknowledges them, it is too late because he kills himself.

- Vivian Solis, a.k.a. the Frogmouth, is one of the central sexual icons in Jaime’s story world. Her nickname comes from the sound of her croaky voice. A former stripper and would-be actor, she is trashy and unashamed.

- Angel Rivera befriends Maggie when the latter becomes manager of an apartment complex. She retains a bit of weight but is athletic and not very self-conscious about the way she looks. In the third series of Love and Rockets, she becomes fascinated with some of Maggie’s older Tri-Girl Adventures comic books. In a dreamlike manner, she even becomes a masked crusader and joins a female superhero team.

- Luba is the most central figure in Gilbert’s story world and one of the most sexualized characters in Love and Rockets. Her unusually large breasts are her distinguishing physical feature. As a young woman, she was promiscuous, becoming involved with a variety of men. She is Gilbert’s strongest character and highly entrepreneurial: She ran one of Palomar’s bathhouses, owned its sole movie theater, and became the mayor. Twice married and twice widowed, she is the mother of Maricela, Guadalupe, Doralis, Casimira, Socorro, Joselito, and Concepcion; the half sister of Fritz and Petra; and the young cousin of Ofelia.

- Pipo Jiminez is a sexually provocative woman popular with the men, but she is also a bit of a tomboy. She has best defined herself outside of the Central American community. A confident entrepreneur, she created a line of clothing and moved to Los Angeles, where she eventually created her own media empire.

- Chelo is a onetime competitor of Luba, having once operated a bathhouse in Palomar and been an object of men’s desire. She eventually becomes the town’s sheriff and, after making peace with Luba, convinces her former rival to run for town mayor. She exudes a muscular sensuality and keeps order without wearing a gun.

- Heraclio Calderon is one of the few distinguished male characters in Gilbert’s comics world. Palomar’s most educated citizen, he works as a schoolteacher. In a brief fling with Luba, he inadvertently fathers Guadalupe. He is married to Carmen.

- Tonantzín Villaseñor is one of Palomar’s most desirable women. She is known for her fried babosa, or slugs. In “Human Diastrophism” she self-immolates while protesting American foreign policy. Her future husband, Khamo, rescues her, suffering lifelong burn scars in the process.
• **Ofelia** is Luba’s older cousin. Her world-weariness counterbalances Luba’s reckless insouciance. She suffers from a back problem as the result of a politically motivated beating. She has held Luba’s family together throughout their adventures.

• **Rosalba Martinez**, a.k.a. Fritz, and **Petra Martinez** are Luba’s younger American half sisters and play a significant role in her life after her family moves to Los Angeles. Petra is athletic and elects to have major breast reduction surgery. In contrast, her bisexual sister Fritz defines herself largely through her body and her sexuality. Distinguished at first by her prominent lisp, she attains a career as a psychologist, has an on-and-off affair with Pipo, and eventually becomes a B-movie star.

**Artistic Style**

The styles of the Hernandez brothers are strikingly different. Mario’s is the roughest of the three, although his illustrations are a rarity in *Love and Rockets*. Gilbert’s art is less realistic and more expressive than Jaime’s, and as a result, his illustrations appear less sophisticated to some fans. His work is heavily influenced by the kind of comics he grew up reading, such as those by Jack Kirby and Charles M. Schulz. The artistic debt he owes to Robert Crumb is especially apparent in his explicit, often outrageous depictions of sex. Jaime’s illustrations reflect more of a clean-line style. His work has been particularly influenced not only by Dan DeCarlo, but also by Hank Ketcham and Schulz.

Both Gilbert and Jaime employ many of the stylistic gestures common in classic comic strips. These include a variety of emanata (lines indicating shock), grawlixes (symbols replacing expletives), comical facial features, and exaggerations of physical actions, all of which contribute to an occasional cartoony tone. Such moments punctuate their comics in ways that further their storytelling, revealing not only the brothers’ grasp of the comics tradition but also their mastery over the entire lexicon of cartoon art.

In terms of subject matter, the Hernandez brothers’ work betrays some stylistic differences. Jaime’s comics tend to represent more realistic scenarios, whether set

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**Gilbert Hernandez**

One of the famed Los Bros Hernandez, Gilbert Hernandez began publishing *Love and Rockets* with his brothers Jaime and Mario in the early 1980’s and it became the defining comic book series of the American alternative movement. Gilbert’s contributions to the series revolve primarily around the fictional Mexican town of Palomar, where a vast cast of characters come together to create an epic depiction of an entire way of life. His graphic novels *Human Diastrophism* and *Heartbreak Soup* are among the most important works ever published in comics. In the late 1990’s, Gilbert’s work came to focus increasingly on just one of the Palomar characters, Luba. He has also published stand-alone graphic novels outside of *Love and Rockets*, including *The Troublemakers*, *Chance in Hell*, and *Speak of the Devil*, each of which is an adaptation of a fictional B-movie. Gilbert Hernandez’s work has strong magical realist overtones, and he is renowned for his ability to craft truly believable characters in his fiction.

**Jaime Hernandez**

The creator, alongside his brothers Gilbert and Mario, of the legendary comic book series *Love and Rockets*, Jaime Hernandez rose to fame as a chronicler of the Los Angeles punk rock scene in the 1980’s and is now celebrated as one of the greatest practitioners of the comics form. Jaime Hernandez’s contribution to the title he shared with his brothers is generally known as *Locas*. The stories focus on Maggie and Hopey, their on-again off-again relationship, and their circle of friends in the Hoppers neighborhood of Los Angeles. In addition to crafting a truly believable cast of characters and locale, Hernandez is responsible for having created two of the most memorable characters in American comics, and he has chronicled their lives for more than three decades. Hernandez’s art is influenced by a wide range of American cartoonists from Hank Ketcham and Harry Lucey to Alex Toth and Jack Kirby. He is one of the most influential cartoonists of his generation and is largely responsible for the turn toward literary-style fiction in alternative comics.
in the West Coast punk scene or in the more mundane environs into which his characters have grown. Occasionally a fantastic side of Jaime’s work takes center stage, as in his earlier “Mechanics” stories, where dinosaurs and rocket ships coexist in a contemporary reality. Gilbert’s storytelling tends to be more surrealistic and nonrepresentational in form, often expressed in short pieces. However, one of his best-known early works, “BEM,” is a long comic that stands as his most fully realized exercise in narrative experimentation. Even Gilbert’s more realistic stories contain bits of the fantastic, and many readers have placed his Palomar work within the tradition of South American magical realism. Thus, surreal events are seamlessly interwoven into his realistic story lines.

References to rock and popular tunes saturate Love and Rockets, providing a kind of soundtrack to the images. Many characters play instruments and are members of bands, and often music is blaring from a radio or being sung. It is no wonder that the 1980’s rock band Love and Rockets took its name from the comic book series.

Themes
One of the most common themes found in Love and Rockets is interpersonal relationships, both romantic and sexual. Love affairs, marriages, sexual couplings, and unrequited loves compose a majority of the story lines. What is more, the sexuality represented is largely fluid and nonconventional, leaving the reader to question the role of heteronormativity in the narrative. Homosexuality, bisexual encounters, fetishism, and other sexual practices are represented in such a way that all become normative within the worlds of Love and Rockets.

In a similar manner, gender roles and expectations are given broad treatment. Jaime’s comics, in particular, have been widely praised for their depictions of women that resist the kind of male-fantasy figures so common in comic books. His female characters struggle with body image, openly discuss their physiques, and come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Gilbert, too, has been praised for his representation of women, especially as powerful individuals controlling their own destinies. However, at the same time, he has been accused of fetishizing the female figure, falling prey to the same kind of exaggerated “fanboy” fantasies found in mainstream comics.

Another common theme found throughout Love and Rockets is the ubiquity of racial and ethnic tensions. Many of the series’ characters, some of whom are immigrants, become victims of prejudice and stereotyping. Ethnic discord and immigration are linked to another theme found in Love and Rockets: conflicts between the individual and the community. Whether the setting is 1980’s punk rock scene in Jaime’s comics or the more tranquil and isolated Central American milieu of Gilbert’s Palomar, the main characters in Love and Rockets are all a part of some community with which they can identify and against which they struggle. In many of Gilbert’s stories, conflicts arise between traditional communities and modernity. In narratives such as “Duck Feet” and “Human Diastrophism,” the author demonstrates how outside forces can impinge upon, and potentially eradicate, older and more traditional ways of understanding the world. Music undergirds both brothers’ comics.

Impact
Along with Daniel Clowes’s Eightball (1989-2004), Peter Bagge’s Hate, and Rick Altergott’s Doofus (1994-1997), Love and Rockets helped to define the alternative comics scene of the 1980’s and early 1990’s. These comics were directly influenced by the underground comics movement of the late 1960’s. However, unlike most of the earlier underground comics, the work of the Hernandez brothers moved beyond isolated and episodic story lines to create epic narrative worlds.

Just as Love and Rockets is indebted to the comics that preceded it, a younger generation of comics artists has been influenced by the Hernandez brothers. This is perhaps most apparent in the field of minority writing. The brothers began creating their material in a time when ethnic minorities did not or could not foreground their own cultural experiences. In Love and Rockets, the Hernandez brothers wrote from the context of their West Coast Latino background, but they did so in a way that normalized those experiences. In other words, their ethnicity was more of a means through which they told their tales, rather than the narrative
focus or subject matter. The Hernandez brothers have shown that a comics creator’s work can have an ethnic perspective without making that the grand sum of the comics.

Derek Parker Royal

Further Reading
Bagge, Peter. *Hate* (1990-1998)

Bibliography
Hernandez, Gilbert. “Palomar and Beyond: An Interview with Gilbert Hernandez.” Interview by Derek Parker Royal. *MELUS* 32, no. 3 (Fall, 2007): 221-246.


See also: *Hate; Twentieth Century Eightball; The Complete Fritz the Cat*