

I read *Bone: Out from Boneville* by Jeff Smith, published in 2005. The version I have is the color edition published by Scholastic.

This is a graphic novel about three Bone cousins. Fone Bone (our main protagonist, and the smallest of the three), Smiley Bone (a tall, good natured Bone wearing a hat & vest), and Phoney Bone (another small Bone, money greedy & wearing a navy shirt with a yellow star). The Bones, all white creatures, are introduced as being lost in a desert, far off their map. Phoney Bone was run out of town because of one of his swindles, and his two cousins came with. Smiley finds a map, and then the three of them are swept up in a sea of locusts.

The story follows Fone Bone as he encounters Rat Creatures, the large Red Dragon, before making his way to the valley on the map. There he meets Ted, a talking bug, who advises him to leave the valley before winter comes, and starts to take him to the wise Thorn. On the way, Fone encounters the Rat Creatures again (which are great comedy relief) and then winter hits. It's like a giant blanket.

The story fast forwards towards the middle part of winter, where Fone has been living in the woods with help from Mrs. Possum. He gets baby sitting duty of her kids, they run off and get caught by the Rat Creatures. Fone saves them, but meets the Red Dragon again in his escape. No one believes that he really saw a dragon. He goes to a nearby hot spring and encounters a lovely red headed girl who we find out is named Thorn. He periodically gets quite silly and has pink hearts when he's around Thorn. She takes him home to the farm where she lives with her Grandma (another fine comedy relief character) whose away with her racing cows.

Meanwhile, we see that Phoney Bone has found his way to the valley, met the possum kids, talked to Ted who takes him to meet Grandma. He then offends her with his comments. He's next seen crashing through the house after an off panel racing cow is abruptly stopped by Grandma. Fone and Phoney embrace happily and are allowed to live in the barn, if they do chores.

Soon it's spring, and Phoney is sick of all the hard work. He steals Fone's shoes and cloak to go to the town to start laying his plan of cheating at the cow race. On his journey through the forest he witnesses the leader of the Rat Creatures chastising the two we'd met previously for not capturing Fone, even though he is not the one they are looking for; they are looking for the small creature like him but with a star on his chest. There are also informed of a meeting with the hooded one. At this meeting, the hooded one directs the Rat Creatures to distract the Red Dragon, and attack the farm house to get at Fone Bone.

That evening, Thorn awakes from a dream from her childhood of a village being attacked by Rat Creatures. Fone informs her that it is happening right then. Grandma tells them to run, and grabs two Rat Creatures through the wall. Thorn and Fone dash for it, in some very beautiful and engaging flight panels before they are surrounded. Fone tries to bluff that the dragon is nearby. The Red Dragon actually is and saves Fone and Thorn. They then return to the now destroyed farm house.

Grandma is alive, having fought the Rat Creatures before in the Big War. She and the Red Dragon have a very terse conversation, where she says very little, and he calls her Rose. Thorn, Fone and Grandma head to town for the spring festival and for safety.

Meanwhile, Phoney has found the local drinking establishment, sits down and asks for a beer and is shocked to see that the bartender is his very own cousin, Smiley! They chat up as they drink a few rounds of beer. However, the owner of the bar confronts Phoney about payment. Cash hasn't been developed in this society, so Phoney is unable to pay the fee of two eggs. He gets sent to the kitchen to clean dishes to work off his tab.

While Phoney is washing dishes, he's confronted through the window by the hooded one. The hooded one promises to kill Fone for waking the Red Dragon, and talks about the business between them. Phoney asks what sort of business, and the hooded one replies (with a scyth in hand) "Your soul".

Thorn, Fone and Grandma reach the town, pass threw the barricade, and Grandma is called "Rosie" and given a flower by the hulking bar owner. He then notices Fone Bone and lets him know there are two others in the bar. Fone is delighted to see Smiley Bone is ok, and they share a nice hug. Fone is also happy to see Phoney, but once they hug, he starts throttling him. The voice over is the watching hooded one who speaks more about the transaction between Phoney Bone and himself.

It's a great action comic, with very memorable characters, great art, and a very interesting story. There are several unanswered questions that make me want to read the entire series. Questions like: what happened in the Big War? Why is Grandma Rose such an excellent fighter? How does she know the Red Dragon, while her Granddaughter Thorn doesn't even believe in dragons? How does the hooded one know about Phoney Bone? I could go on and on. While there are some dark parts, it isn't over done. It's more a good adversary, like the Dark is Rising series by Susan Cooper. I thoroughly enjoyed this graphic novel.