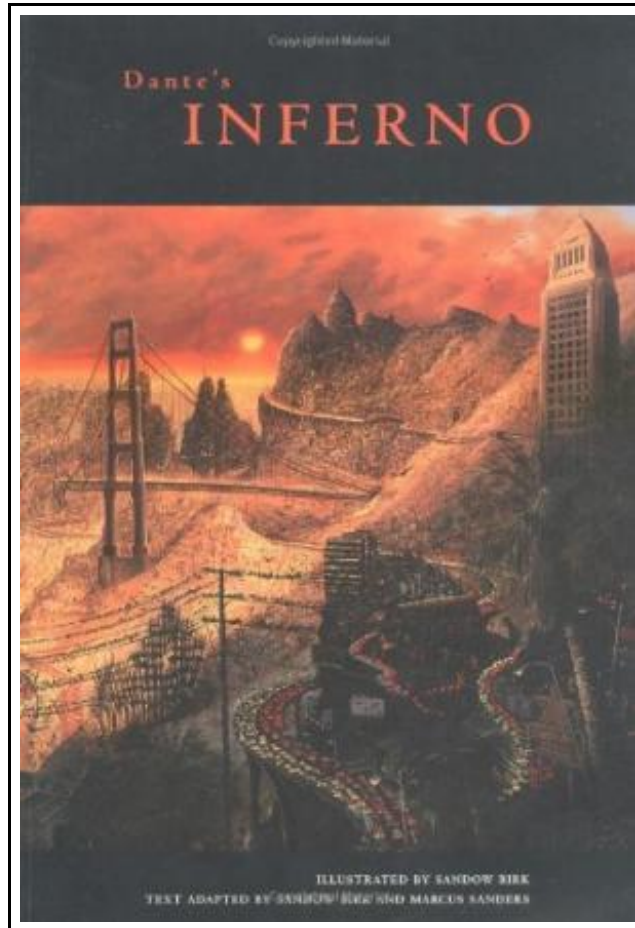


Dante's Inferno



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Reviews

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(Claire Bartell)

DANTE'S INFERNO



Chronicle Books, 2004. Book Condition: New. Brand New, Unread Copy in Perfect Condition. A+ Customer Service! Summary: Creative people who don't write sometimes enjoy a honeymoon with the press -- right up until they put pen to paper. It happened with Madonna. She used to give interviews saying what an old-fashioned girl she really was at heart, how all she'd really like to do was find a nice writer and settle down. Consequently, she barely ever saw a bad review -- until she made the mistake of writing her first book. Critics promptly saw they'd been kidding themselves all along, and they turned on her. So when word got around that the visionary California painter and book artist Sandow Birk was not just illustrating but co-writing a new adaptation of Dante's "Divine Comedy," some of us who cherish his work feared the worst. Sure, he could concoct historical canvases, sketches and propaganda posters about a bloody civil war between San Francisco and Los Angeles, as he did with "In Smog and Thunder: Historical Works From the Great War of the Californias." And OK, he could paint majestic landscapes of each of California's 33 state prisons in the luminist style of Albert Bierstadt and Frederic Remington, as he did with "Incarcerated: Visions of California in the 21st Century." Pasticheing great painters was one thing. But Dante? In tackling not just fine but literary art for the first time, was Birk cruising for the same bruising Madonna got? In a word, no. This version of the "Inferno" is God's face in a Groucho mask, a triumphant cathedral that will bring new readers to Dante, new appreciation for Birk's model here -- the great French illustrator Gustave Dore -- and new converts to the growing church of Sandow Birk. The cover is so...



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