

**A Completely
Biased Guide To
Comics I Think
You Will Or
Won't Enjoy.**

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CrookedTreeHousePress. But, you know, tell your friends.**

For the last couple of years, I've been reading as much as possible, and recording some of my thoughts on GoodReads. My challenge for 2017 was to read 104 non-superhero graphic novels. I succeeded! But I didn't stop. While this year I've branched out to a Stephen King Dark Tower chronology, revisiting some of my favorite young adult books, and doing my best to read more essays, even though I don't particularly enjoy non-fiction.

This book collects some of the reviews of my favorites, and not-so-favorites. I hope they inspire you to pick up some books at your local comic book store, or order some online. And if you do, let me know what you think!

And, as always, thanks for reading and supporting!

—Adam

Draw Your Own Conclusions

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When a potential customer comes into the store and tells me they're interested in starting a new comic book series, something not Marvel or DC, Chew is one of the first books I recommend. It's funny. It's unique. It's got some sci-fi, some police procedural, some political commentary, and a lot of heart.

You don't get a ton of the heart in the first volume, nor many of the pencilled-in background jokes that Guillory later sprinkled throughout the series. What you get is a non-stop barrage of plot and character developments that I misremembered as taking place over the first three volumes, not all packed into the first one. So many things happen in this first volume

that the minutiae that ended up being a core part of the series humor would have been too much.

There's a lot of gross-out humor in this book. And while some of the concepts that are so gross, you're supposed to laugh at them didn't make me laugh, they also didn't lessen my enjoyment. What made me laugh was how relatable I found the lead character, Tony Chu.

Here's a review I wrote for the first issue on the iFanboy website in 2009:

"In a world where poultry is outlawed, only outlaws have poultry. In a post-bird flu society, the FDA has all the power, and two beat cops staking out illegal chicken consumers are told just how little power they actually have. It's just an awesome cop story, but with the FDA in the place of the FBI, and a dude that can tell the history of everything that touches his food, just by eating it.

The layout and coloring on this book are fanfuckentastic. The few times that Guillory breaches the panel, I found myself so impressed that I'd go back a few pages and give the art another look-over. I tend to be more of a story guy, so I usually view the art as more background, but I really respect when an artist can pull me in and let me know that, while the story would be good on its own right, the right story/art combo can make a comic, well...art."

The whole series wrapped up a couple of months ago, and the final collection comes out today, so I decided to go back and read the whole series. I'm pleased to say that I enjoyed the first volume just as much as I did when I was reading it in issues. I can't wait to find out what else I'm misremembering about this book. I'm pretty sure this won't be the final time I read this.



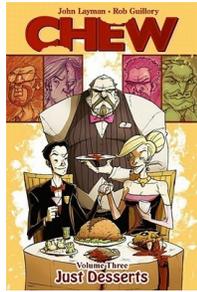
Much like the first collection, the second installment of Chew, “International Flavors” throws a barrage of characters and subplots at you with practically every page turn. We also see the series’ artist, Rob Guillory, start to throw in gags in the background, such as a poster at the hotel that reads “Please do not urinate on the resort walls”, and a copy of “Vibes magazine” in a suspect’s apartment, which reads “What up with Kanye”.

As mentioned in my review of volume one, this is one of my go-to recommendations for comic book readers looking to venture outside the superhero long box. I’ve read some criticism that people think there isn’t enough character development in these early volumes. Maybe some seasoned comic book/graphic novel readers want to have all their character exposition upfront, but I really enjoy that John Layman is just bombarding readers with new characters, new concepts, new plot entanglements, and keeping the story so interesting that it actually doesn’t matter that much if the lead character is an interesting person, or just a bland person with an interesting power. To take an issue, or even a few pages to explore Agent Chu’s family life in this volume would have taken the reader out of the action.

The only real spoiler I’ll give is that there Will Be Character Development Soon, and it doesn’t come at the expense of the pace or the story.

Also, the cover on this volume is magnificent, especially after you read the story.

Viva Poyo!



One of my favorite parts of John Layman and Rob Guillory's "Chew" is the hidden gags scrawled on walls or on magazines drawn into the background. I just noticed a bulletin on the walls of The Mercury-Sun (Chew's version of The Boston Globe or The Chicago Tribune) that reads:

"News policy: More feelings. Less facts. -- The Mgmt"

The truth is compact and painful.

This volume is where we finally get a peek into Tony Chu's life outside the FDA. We also have some amazing covers by Rob Guillory from some Tarantino-inspired movie posters to a tri-fold cover of The Last Supper for the Thanksgiving issue. Add to that an issue where "the pages got shuffled out of sequence", and you have amped-up weirdness in an already unconventional series. And, surprisingly, it fricken works

Much of what I love about Chew is the structure. There is generally one or more prologues that set you up for the main storyline, a moment of unreliable narration, events unfold, and then a last page reveal that entices you to pick up the next issue, without making it a cliffhanger. Each issue is tied up neatly so that you don't feel annoyed that (when the series was coming out in issue format) you have to wait 30 days for the next chapter.



This volume has five excellent stories, each one centered around Tony's relationships with particular characters that we were introduced to in previous volumes, and each one a piece of solving the puzzle laid out in the previous volume.

The fifth issue (chapter), in particular, opens with some beautiful full page spreads by Rob Guillory that suggest the scope of the events to come.

You should also check out the back cover of every volume of Chew. It contains the requisite synopsis to get you interested in the book, the awards the series has won, typical praise from trusted comic sources, and always one negative review also from a popular website or podcast. The only things truly missing are the cat pictures that readers would send in, that adorned the back pages of each issue



What I find to be a major failing of many comic series (or any serialised media) is a lack of consequences. Something terrible happens in an issue or a storyline, and it's eventually erased or made inconsequential by another writer. It's why I mostly gravitate toward creator owned books where a single writer and artist work together to tell a specific story. This doesn't guarantee consequences for characters or plots but it does solidify that any non-consequences were probably intended by the writer and artist and not merely overruled by an editor or

new creative team.

With Chew, for the first five volumes, we've seen small consequences for the characters that they have to overcome to reach their goals. All of the life changing occurrences happened in their pasts. We see glimpses of them but all of the Oh Fuck moments have centered around plot twists rather than character development. Sure, sometimes we've seen things that we, the readers, didn't know about the characters, but that didn't alter the characters' lives in a significant way. Here, at the halfway point of the series, that changes, as John Layman turns the book in a more serious direction, and Rob Guillory makes the shift cartoonishly stunning to look at.

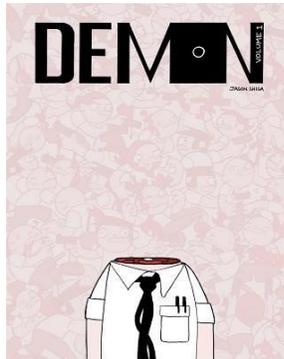


When a comic book or graphic novel takes a turn involving the plot or a main character going from happy-go-lucky, to driven and vengeful, the colors of the book almost always go from bright and shiny to thick lines and muted colors. A literal darkening or muddying of tones (see Marvel's entire comic line during Dark Reign).

The end of volume six heralded a huge shift in tone for Chew. The humor is still there, the wacky plots and food powers are still being introduced at a Gatling gun pace, but the lead character, Tony Chu, has grown and is interacting with the world in a more focused way.

Rob Guillory not only pencils and inks Chew, he also does the colors, and while his entire run on this book has been gorgeous, bold, and unique, it's in this volume that the coloring game goes up several notches. When a character is out of phase with who they used to be (not always literally, often just as a result of character growth), they are colored to look out of place, not muted or shadowed, but differently colored.

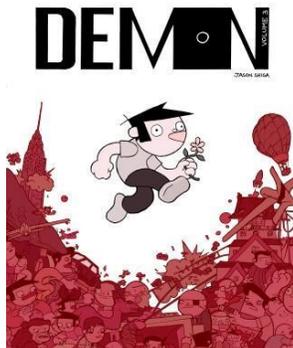
I don't always pick up on artistic details like this on first read unless the process is obvious or clumsy. This book is neither but I noticed early on that Guillory was ramping up his art as Layman was ramping up the plot. It's truly impressive that a series that started this good, continues to get even better.



Jason Shiga loves mazes and puzzles. It's very well documented in his deceptively simple looking art. With Demon, we get a dark as Hell puzzle. What happens if, having lost everything, and committed a heinous crime, you decided to end it all, only to find out that you couldn't die?

Why or how he can't die is, initially a mystery that that protagonist (Jimmy) solves after committing many more equally heinous crimes.

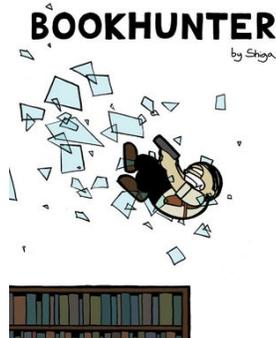
I'm not usually a fan of books that center around morally reprehensible people but there's something about Jimmy's exasperation, initial, cluelessness, and desire not to have someone else in control of his reprehensible power that had me rooting for him.



There's a scene in this volume of Shiga's disturbing immortality immortality play, when the protagonist is explaining to a child how awful the world is. It goes on for several pages without too much change in the art. It a long soliloquy about how age destroys the joy of youth. It's not a terribly original conceit, but when delivered by someone several hundred years old, who has been splitting his life between protecting his daughter and being as hedonistic as possible, often at the expense of others, it's really effective.

The expansion of understanding how the demonology works in this book is also really fascinating. And the ending brought out a whole new level of Whatthefuckness, which is impressive, given that this series started with a guy repeatedly killing himself after the death of his family.

The only drawback was that the book jumps over three hundred years between the end of volume two and the middle of volume three, and yet the world looks exactly the same. It actually looks a bit late twentieth century. It didn't ruin the story or anything, it just briefly pulled me out of the narrative to think that the world would be so similar in 2400, given how the world has changed in the mere forty years I've been alive.



I saw a review of Jason Shiga's Demon online, and decided I wanted to check out. And I loved it. It's dark, weird, and more fun than a book with its subject matter should be. A few days after reading the second volume, I was moving some books around at work and found a copy of Bookhunter.

It's certainly brighter than Demon (as are most books) but it is just as fun. It's a weird 70s crime story centered around a theft at a library. I read a few reviews that mentioned that it was the sort of book that only appealed to librarians. This is true in the same way that police procedurals are only interesting to police officers, science fiction stories are only interesting to aliens who have travelled out of their own solar system, and book reviews written by idiots are only interesting to other idiots who write book reviews.

This is a silly action book that is more humorous than funny, but did have one sequence that made me laugh out loud. And it made me laugh out loud again when I just reread it.

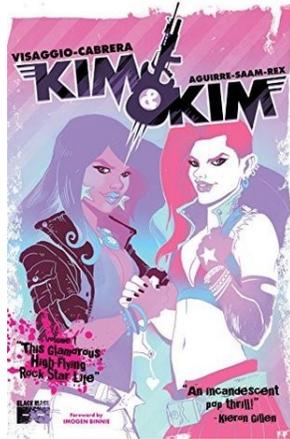
The art is very cartoony in a sort of early 2000s Adult Swim way but with less squigglevision. It's a black and white book, and I hope that, if it ever gets colored, it's done in a very muted orangey Barney Miller sort of way.

If you've ever wondered what Kill Bill would be like if it took place in Jamaica, The Bride was queer, and the violence was played out by gun wielding cops instead of samurai swords, Virgil is your answer. Steve Orlando has written a really intense story about a Jamaican police force discovering that one of their own officers was gay, and setting out to destroy his life.

It's a good story but it's very neatly wrapped up through the eyes of someone who liked their protagonist too much to make the story believable. Which is fine, there aren't a lot of believable revenge stories out there, but I wanted this one to be more realistic.

JD Faith's art is strong, and he set up some interesting page layouts that, sadly, were a bit swallowed in the trade.





There is a trend in modern comics to write young female characters with pop-culture drenched dialog and the sort of snappy patter that feel more at home in an episode of “Will & Grace” than a comic book. It wasn’t until reading Magdalene Visaggio’s Kim & Kim that I had the obvious realization that the problem was that the snappy patter young women were all being written by men.

I’m not saying it can’t be done successfully by men, Kieron Gillen and Kurtis J. Wiebe have some wonderful female-character-fronted comics but Visaggio’s Kim & Kim feels more honest than either of them. This is not a writer putting on a voice, this is a writer who speaks within the same vernacular as

their characters.

Kim & Kim is a grand bounty hunting adventure with fantastic characters who spout one-liners but are not defined by their one-liners. And while there are some genuine villains who put in appearances, this first volume is less a case of good vs. evil than the story of people coming from various sides of a situation, trying to do what’s best but fucking up from time to time, as people tend to do.

Eva Cabrera’s art and Claudia Aguirre’s art and color blend harmoniously here. The panels are laid out fairly traditionally (they’re not on a Watchmen grid or anything, but I don’t remember any characters breaking out of a panel) and sometimes feel slightly cramped, but certainly less cramped than a lot of modern superhero comics.

This is a fun, and well-paced sci-fi adventure that I would recommend to anyone who enjoys the offbeat action of Chew or wish there were more buddy-cop style comics that featured two female characters.

I would also recommend it to the old dudes who come into stores and complain about how Marvel & DC keep “turning” classic characters female instead of inventing new and exciting female characters in comics. If you’re one of those guys (you’re probably not reading this), put your money where your dick is and buy this book. It’s awesome.



Boom Box, the imprint of Boom! Studios features all-ages books, usually about teens or pre-teens having adventures that might fall under the category of “quirky”. Not all of the books have been my favorites, but I am not the target audience for most of them. I’ve recommended all of the ones that have been released thusfar to people looking all-age adventure books, and the worst criticism I’ve heard from customers is that a book “wasn’t for me”.

Backstagers was for me in the 90s.

The story of the stage crew at an all-boys school hits pretty close to home. I both acted and did crew in high school, and was queer but not out, which seems to be the case with many characters in this book. Seems to be.

There are no real love stories in this book. It’s mainly teenagers infatuated with each other in a very non-sexual way (it’s an all-ages book). A boy is infatuated with a female actor. Two members of the crew who are both male are infatuated with each other. The villainous actors are infatuated with themselves. But nobody kisses or expresses their love, they just adventure together.

There is a magic basement involved, which, sadly, is not similar to my high school experience, but the level of melodrama and people treating each other poorly because hormones make everyone a bit of a monster in high school seemed true to my experience.

This is a fun, fluffy adventure story that has very low-stakes peril), and is safe for all ages, but may not appeal to the under 12 set.



In addition to the magical realm of all backstages of high school theaters, this volume dwells on queer romance throughout gay backstage history, and lets us know that if an entire cadre of queer high school students go missing for two weeks, the police won’t be involved, and the parents will just ground their kids, rather than sue the shit out of the school, and maybe hire an entire team of psychiatrists, ghostbusters and exorcists to investigate The Backstage.

Like volume one, this is fun, all-ages, queer inclusive, and at least bordering on hokey/sappy, if not living proudly dead center in the middle of Saptown.

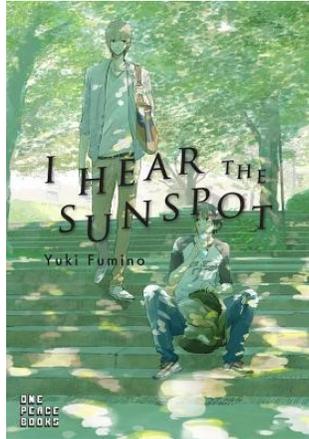


When it was announced that Gene Luen Yang was going to be doing a graphic novel series that continued the story of “Avatar: The Last Airbender”, I was very excited. And his work did not disappoint. I would probably give every volume he’s written either four or five stars, as they do a wonderful job of continuing, not just the story but, the feel of “The Last Airbender” TV series. A week ago, I would have told you it was the best you could hope for an adaptation/continuation of the Avatar Universe, but I was wrong. Michael Dante DiMartino is a co-creator of the Avatar universe. Yang does an amazing job at using the voice and tone DiMartino set for the series, but reading this first volume of

Legend Of Korra is like watching the first two seasons of “Last Airbender”. The humor isn’t reminiscent, it’s The Same. And Irene Koh’s layouts are a perfect fit with DiMartino’s storytelling.

It’s not a spoiler to mention that DiMartino doubles down on the ending of the TV series, and Korra and Asimi’s queer relationship. While this is a major component to the first book, it’s not The Only part of the story. We get some aftermath from the final TV season, as well as the introduction of a new villain.

If you loved the “Legend of Korra” TV series, you’ll most likely love this. If you watched the series but thought it could be improved upon, this book might be your wish fulfillment. If you liked the series but hate the idea that two of the leads end up in a non-heterosexual relationship, you should probably re-evaluate your life choices before reading this.



I have some coworkers and friends who get incensed when someone tells that they “can’t get into comics or graphic novels”. I get it. For me, I have a difficult time with manga. It’s both a different style of writing and artwork than the American and European comics I grew up on. And while there is some manga that I love, a lot of it seems Very Much The Same to me. I imagine this is the way many people feel about superhero comics.

I Hear The Sunspot is conceptually very cool. It’s a very non-sexual boylove story about an introverted heard-of-hearing college student and

the always-hungry and audacious guy who volunteers to take notes for him.

For most of the book, the love story is very subtextual, and when it does come to the forefront it seems very realistic and, unlike many American stories about sexuality-focused-coming-of age, it’s not played for melodrama.

Through no fault of the author/artist, I couldn’t get into this. To me, a lot of manga looks similar (again, I assume this is the way some people see superhero comics...I get it). So while I love Hiroaki Samura’s Blade of the Immortal, Katsuhiro Otomo’s Akira, Eiji Otsuka’s The Kurosagi Corpse Delivery Service, and virtually anything by Osamu Tezuka, Junji Ito, or Naoki Urasawa, much of the rest of manga doesn’t appeal to me. And while the story was not melodramatic, the dialog of the audacious note taker is Way Over The Top in a way that I associate with adolescent characters in manga. It’s not for me, and kept pulling me out of the story.

But if you like manga, particularly quiet, realistic manga, you might love this.

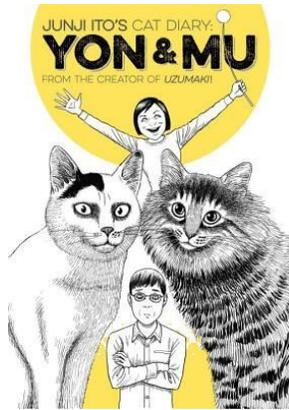


I've told the story to several people of the time I recommended I Kill Giants to one of my exes because he enjoyed manga, completely forgetting that the emotional core of that book (no spoilers here) tied deeply into his own childhood in a way that would lead to an emotional breakdown.

The thing is, I've recommended that book to at least hundreds of people. And as someone whose relationship with Joe Kelly's writing is split evenly between This Is Pretty Good (Four Eyes and Space Ghost), and Fuck This Guy (Bad Dog and Bang! Tango), I credited Ken Niimura's art for being the most important part of why I love I Kill Giants.

Henshin isn't supposed to be anything like I Kill Giants. It's a series of short stories about transformations in ordinary life. Or so it claims. The opening story about a girl escaping bullying by visiting her uncle in Tokyo (who might possibly be Yakuza...we aren't given time to tell) is not an ordinary life story. There are other stories about cats, stories about...fart ghosts? and stories about how missing a train can derail your life, but I didn't connect with a single character in this collection. For me, this was a series of shrugs, some drawn beautifully, some just competently.

I don't know who I'd recommend this to. There's much better manga out there for off-kilter nearly normal stories, and I don't think anyone who doesn't already enjoy manga would enjoy reading this



A couple of years ago, when we were still doing the VeXed Men podcasts, we did a forty-five minute show on horror manga. It was way out of my wheelhouse, but Andrew Campana recommended a series of books, including Junji Ito's Gyo: Complete Deluxe Edition. I didn't find it terrifying. Mostly it was strange in a somewhat enjoyable way, but it definitely made me want to keep an eye out for other Junji Ito books. So, when, a week later, Cat Diary came out, I was excited to see what it was all about.

This is a somewhat mundane story of a dog person whose partner brings not one but two cats into his life, and how it sends him Over The Edge.

No, he doesn't throw anyone off of a building, or start drowning the neighborhood children, he just Really Wants The Cats To Like Him. It's not quite sweet or endearing, it's mostly weird. But it's a slice of life comic drawn in the style of horror manga, and that makes otherwise mundane scenes hilarious. The terror in the humans' eyes when they realize the door has been left open and the cats might have been able to escape into the hallway is laughably ridiculous in a brilliant and satisfying way.



If you look at this cover and think "Oh, man! A book where cats are people and people are cats? I hope there are several hundred pages exploring every possibility that switcheroo has to offer!" then this might be a five star book for you.

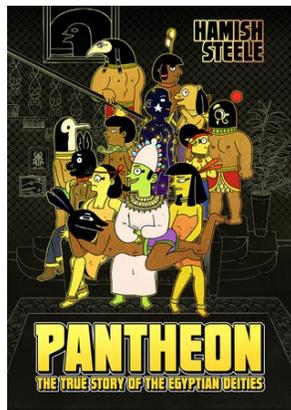
If you look at the cover and the description, and think "I hope there's something more to the gimmick than just people are cats and cats are people." don't just walk, run away from this book.



John Layman is one of my favorite creators currently working in comics. I was excited to pick up his first creator owned book after Chew. It certainly wasn't what I expected when he'd mentioned that this series exists in the same world as Chew, and also contained food based powers, but it was quirky and fun.

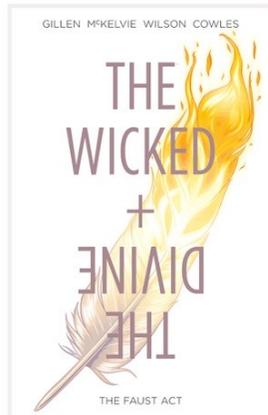
Sam Kieth is artist who I loved in the 90s, whose work is always gorgeous, but who mainly draws the same looking female protagonist over and over and over. I loved it in The Maxx but by the time Kieth's Lobo titles came out, I was tired of seeing this same looking girl who was not the same girl. I also recall a Batman story by Kieth that was Alice In Wonderland themed, which was Too On The Nose for me. But his work here, despite the main female protagonist looking like all of Sam Kieth's other protagonist, is flawless. I love the way he bends panels instead of breaking them, I love the occasional subtle shifts in style when dealing with the antagonist. The book just looks gorgeous.

Much like The Maxx, the story isn't as focused as I had hoped, and it seems more concerned with being quirky than getting the story told. But, as the series was only five issues so far, it was able to keep me interested all the way through, even though I suspected it wasn't going to be narratively satisfying.



If you're looking for a silly but technically accurate story about Egyptian mythology, featuring liberal use of the word "humping" and the phrase "absolute cock", Hamish Steele's Pantheon is THE book for you. It does a great job at pointing out how ridiculous Greek myth is, but it neither made me laugh, nor engaged me in said ridiculous stories.

I enjoyed the concept, and the art, but the humor's execution just fell flat for me. And without the humor, there's not much purpose to this book.



In 2008, former Green Screen Enthusiast, now rich zombie-screenwright, Robert Kirkman and Marvel apologist and snappy-patter-phile, Brian Michael Bendis had a big debate about how to be a successful comic book creator. Do you start doing independent work and hope that Marvel or DC pick you up so that you can make money and a name for yourself, or do you work your way up the Marvel/DC masthead until you have a name so that you can produce your own creator owned comics?

Before watching the debate, I hadn't considered the difference between the theories. Since then, I often take note of creators who go back and forth, and how I feel about their creator owned work vs. their for-hire work.

It turns out, I much prefer Jamie McKelvie and Kieron Gillen to be reigned in.

When I was much more attuned to what comic book fans were blogging about online, their names kept coming up, as people loved their book, Phonogram. I hated it. I love McKelvie's art, but I wanted to punch every one of their characters in the face. It's to their credit that they can make characters composed entirely of ink and imagination so hateable and pretentious. But I just couldn't take it. There wasn't a single character I wanted to know more about.

When they hopped over to Marvel to start working on series like Defenders, Journey Into Mystery, and Uncanny X-Men, I started really liking some of Gillen's characters. And when they worked together on Young Avengers, I loved it. The seamless blending of their art (Gillen's writing, and McKelvie's pencils and inks) really shone with some spectacular panel breaking and dynamic characters. So I was really excited to see what their next creator owned series was.

The first time I read this, I was still on the high from The Young Avengers. McKelvie's art kept defying the odds and improving. And Matthew Wilson's colors really made the character's makeup pop. Rereading it this year? I hate these characters. They're insufferably angsty (which...teenagers...so, it's accurate). Worse, though, is that there are so many weird plothes and missing information, that I'm amazed my eyes don't just fall through the book. It's shocking that it takes enough form to be tangible. Following the insufferable characters as they say inane things and fail to follow the logical course the story suggests is tedious. Many interesting concepts are opened up, but not only are they not answered by the end of the volume, they also, like the middle seasons of *Lost*, seem so preposterous that I don't care if they're ever revisited.



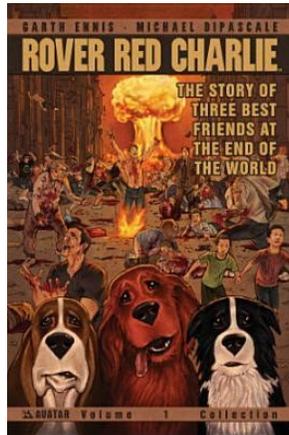
Mark Millar is probably the most divisive creators in comics. Like the others I can think of: Frank Miller, Dave Sim, and Howard Chaykin, he has some great work and some that seems out-of-touch and/or problematic. Unlike the others on the list, I believe his work is getting better and less hacky as he goes on.

Empress is not The Best Sci-Fi Comic Out This Year! It's not challenging the form, or trying to be shocking. I think Millar's finally past that, and has settled for writing really fun stories. This story is your average pulpy sci-fi about an empress fleeing from her abusive husband in order to give her children, and herself, a better life. And while there is more than meets the eye to this series, there's not Much more than meets the eye, and that's ok.

The pacing on this book is fantastic, as each issue dumps the cast into a more and more harrowing experience. You never fear they're never going to get out of the situation, you just want to see how they manage.

Stuart Immonen's art is also perfect for this space adventure. Apart from one tricky transitioning page in the first issue, his art naturally leads you to the next panel, and you want to linger a bit on his characters, even though the story is telling you to turn the page. And I've Svorcina's colors are dazzling.

If you're looking for a sci-fi book to breeze through, this one's for you. If you're looking for really complex characters and solid allegorical political discourse, skip this one.



There's very few writers in the world that I find as divisive as Garth Ennis. I don't just mean that some people love him, and some people hate him. That's true for most authors. I mean that sometimes I love his work, and sometimes I despise it.

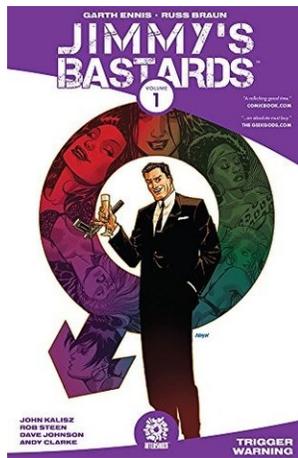
If, fifty years from now, you look up the term "shock value" in LiteraryDictionary.com, there will be a picture of Garth Ennis, and the description "This motherfucker here loves to cock up your expectations." I like but don't love [Preacher](#), I really enjoyed [The Boys](#) and his run on [Hellblazer](#), and Ennis was the first writer that made Marvel's [The Punisher](#) appeal to me. On the flipside I think books like [Dicks](#) and [A Train Called Love](#) are unreadable garbage.

About a decade ago, I was working in a store when his original run on [Crossed](#) came out. It's the epitome of a shock value zombie apocalypse story, but there was enough really interesting humanity in it to keep me entertained. This book is similarly premised: something in the world goes horribly wrong and the humans become depraved and murderous. However in this story, they are quickly pushed into the background as we see how dogs (and to a lesser degree, cats) handle an apocalyptic scenario where humans have become sociopathic murder machines.

Some of the dog-isms in the book are amusing: the fact that when dogs bark they are usually saying "I'm a dog! I'm a dog!" is fun, if a little reminiscent of the seagulls in [Finding Nemo](#) who only ever say "Mine!" But most of them got tired for me very quickly.

My main issue with this book is that I mostly didn't care what happened to any of the dogs. Unlike Brian K. Vaughan's [Pride of Baghdad](#) or Grant Morrison's [We3](#), I never believed the animals would communicate the way they do in the book, and therefore, none of the consequences ever engaged my emotions. Scenes that were supposed to be sad made me roll my eyes, and those that were meant to shock me merely had me shaking my head "Oh Garth, we're back to shit jokes, again?"

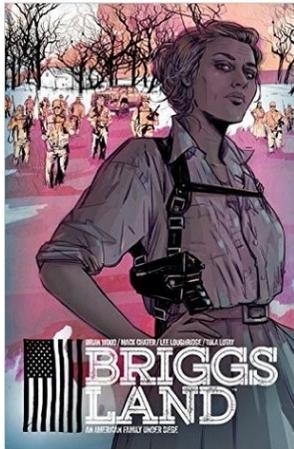
I didn't give much of a thought to Michael DiPascale's art while I read the book because I was working hard trying to enjoy the story. But he did a really gorgeous job drawing this, and I hope to check out his work on his other title, [Hero Worship](#).



A quick flip through of this comic, and I realized it was going to fall on the Ugh side of the Garth Ennis divide, but I decided to read through, anyway, to see if I could find anything appealing apart from Russ Braun's art.

In short, no.

The premise: A parody where a playboy James Bond is being targeted by all of his illegitimate children is, at least, original, but the way Ennis writes these characters manages to both seem like he's trying Way Too Hard to be edgy while simultaneously farting out a lazy hack job of a comic. I hope he derives great pleasure from this style of writing (also seen in [A Train Called Love](#) and [Dicks](#), because it's an absolute chore to read. It makes me think a lot less of the guy who also wrote [Battlefields](#), and [The Boys](#), which had their fair share of crass language and shock humor, but also had likable characters and were entertaining. Apart from giving 1.5" stiffies to any alt-right morons who pick this up, I'm not sure who else will get any enjoyment out of this.

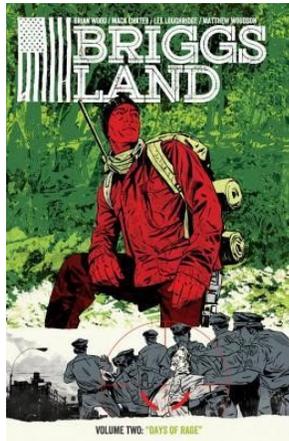


My least favorite television series trend of the 21st century is ensemble shows with no redeemable characters. I was two seasons into “It’s Always Sunny In Philadelphia” before I found it unwatchable. I can stomach “The League” in small doses, but I don’t really enjoy it, even though it’s fairly well written.

I am very worried that, even though I enjoyed this first volume of Briggs Land, that I’m not going to be able to find anyone to root for as the series continues.

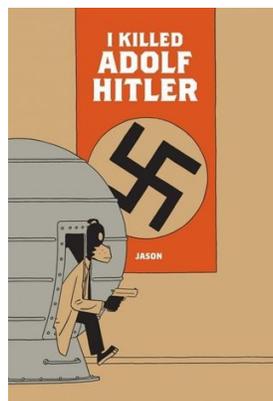
The protagonist is a woman who has decided to fight her incarcerated White Supremacist husband for control of their family and the land they occupy, which is off the grid in The United States. While she seems to be the least problematic member of her family/cult, and MIGHT be on a journey of a redemption, she is definitely a person who has spent her entire adult life profiting off racism. Not the casual racism that many Americans profit off without thinking about, but rich KKK CEOs funneling money through Nazis racism. And it is unclear in this volume whether or not she’s in any way reformed. Sure, her actions come at the expense of other White Supremacists, but is it because she’s evolving her beliefs or merely because she wants to be America’s Next Top Racist?

Exploring that in the next volume will decide if I want to continue reading this series.



I am surprised to still be enjoying this series about a separatist group living in northern New York. I don't particularly like any of the characters but I'm enjoying that Wood is able to write about these morally gray characters in such a way that I don't find them repulsive, nor am I ever rooting for them. If the next volume featured them all being gunned down by the American government, I'd think it was a fitting ending. Yet, I'm still curious what will happen to this family that is trying to distance themselves from the former patriarch's ties to racist hate groups, and a drug running business that the new matriarch wants eliminated from their community.

The only thing keeping this from being a five star book is that two of the issues have guest artists, and they're just not anywhere near the same quality as Mack Chater's.



We get it. You're a good person. If someone gave you a time machine, the first thing your unoriginal but well-intentioned behind would do is go back to the early twentieth century and kill Hitler. Or his parents. Or you'd buy enough of his mediocre art that he never develops his...Hitler complex. He even shaves his mustache!

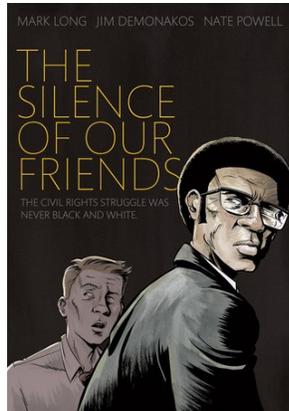
Good for you. Have a fascist-free cookie!

The protagonist of Jason's I Killed Adolf Hitler is not you. He's not a particularly a good person. He's a contract killer who agrees to go back in time to kill The Führer. And, as you might expect, things don't

go to plan.

Unlike most time-travel stories, this one is incredibly straight-forward, and easy to follow. It's even a little sweet.

Like all Jason books, people are drawn as animals, and the dialog is very direct. If you buy this and enjoy it, I also recommend picking up his anthology Almost Silent.



History has taught me not to believe in happy endings or memoirs. Both are involved in Mark Long, Jim Demonakos, and Nate Powell's graphic novel about late 1960s American racism.

I didn't do any research about the story or the authors (I was only familiar with Powell's work) before reading it, and was surprised by how much of the first portion of the story focused on how a white family was affected by violence against black students and protesters. But that shifts as the story goes on, and becomes an uncomfortable but not difficult look at every character in the book.

And they are characters. Like many modern memoirs, this story has been highly fictionalized "for storytelling purposes" to find "a balance between factual accuracy and emotional authenticity." Which the author addresses in the afterword.

There is an unsatisfying pacing in the narrative, as it doesn't give a proper sense of time passing. The ending (not the trite, paint-by-numbers epilogue, but the actual ending to the main story) seems implausible given the history of the American Justice System, race relations in the 20th and 21st centuries, and the events that lead up to it. It bothered me enough that I did some research on the events the story is based on. If the story had been less compelling, I might not have spared the effort but I needed to know that the ending (and, again, I don't mean the epilogue) was historically true. The answer is: sort of. The end result is true but there are years that take place between page 158 and 159, but the story and the lack of characters aging makes it seem like only weeks or months.

Powell's art is excellent, as always. And while Long and Demonakos's pacing had me questioning the historical accuracy of their narrative, I never doubted their emotional authenticity.



I've been using the 2010 version of this book as a resource to widen the scope of which creators I seek out in both webcomics and physical comics. This new edition is considerably larger (not just thicker and filled with more up-to-date information, but physically larger) which makes the art pop even more.

Most of essays about each creator are simple one paragraph descriptions of their style and some of the projects they've worked on. These little paragraph pops left me wanting more, but, hey, I know how Google works, I can get the rest of the information that way. The longer essays within the book taught me a bunch of things about creators that I hadn't previously heard, which makes this the most useful essay book on comic creators that I've read.

I recommend it to anyone looking to read more comics, particularly by Black creators. And anyone who just likes looking at art books. And don't just read it for Back History Month either. This is a 365/365 resource



It's really tough to put out an anthology of comics for a good cause and make it memorable. This collection boasts a number of talented artists and writers from the comics industry. And while I found myself nodding (in agreement, not exhaustion) at several times while I read it, when I reached the end, none of it had stuck with me.

Most of the stories felt rushed and played more on sentimentality than on engaging with emotions. I don't blame any of the creative teams for this, as it's incredibly tough to pack a three to ten page graphic novel story with enough information and character to stay with a reader.

Also, at the end of the book were a series of pull quotes about how honored all the creators were to be involved, and it felt garish and self-aggrandizing rather than humble and sincere.



I'm generally not a fan of comic book anthologies that give an artist or art team two or three pages to tell political stories. They're often completely forgettable fluff pieces that make you feel good about supporting a comic that aligns with your values but have no real merit.

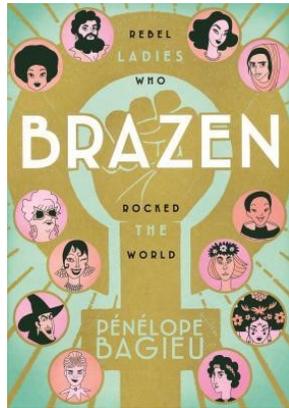
Last year's Love Is Love: A Comic Book Anthology to Benefit the Survivors of the Orlando Pulse Shooting was one of the few books that I preordered, read and purchased the day it came out. I'm glad the book exists. I hope it spread awareness, and raised some money. But I don't remember a single page of it. It's one of the few books where I think "Meh." is a completely acceptable review for it.

On the other hand, Mine! has a slew of stories on a variety of topics that Planned Parenthood deals with. They Are Not All About Planned Parenthood. They are certainly not all about abortion. It's not printed on fetal tissue. It's stories about womens' issues that sometimes involves Planned Parenthood.

There are far too many topics to list but my favorite included:

- the facts about how Vice Morally Bankrupt Piece Of Shit, Mike Pence, weaponized his faith to kill poor people in his constituency
- an older sister explaining what a period is to her idiot brother, and her earnestly wanting to learn brother
- the dumb shit we think we know as teenagers because America is afraid to properly educate children about sex and disease prevention
- a cat serves as a heating pad to help with cramps

There are also a bunch of cool short biographical pieces about lesser known champions of female rights. And, yes, a bunch of dull and preachy stories who put rah-rah-rahing in place of making any sense. But those are usually the majority in this type of anthology, and they really didn't feel very frequent in this one.

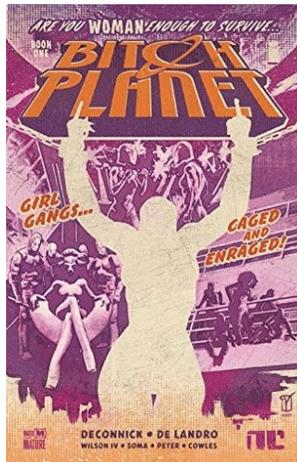


This is an amazing collection of short bios by a fantastic artist. From cover design to layout to subject matter, this is an A++ book.

Bagieu gives us brief synopses of famous female-identified rebels across an array of fields from gynecologists to artists to queens. The story snippets have just the right amount of humor (a bit Kate Beatony), and at the end of each one is a two page spread of a moment from the story. I think most artists would have put the two page spread before the stories, so they acted as covers or introductory art. Those artists would have been wrong. I loved

learning about someone, and Then seeing a gorgeous callback to a detail from the story I just read.

This book is definitely going to spend some time laid out on tables where people can see it, instead of living on a shelf. I may even have to get a few copies as gifts for people.



I love the divergent styles in this book, as it not only shows just how talented Valentine De Landro is, but it really captures the various moods of the book as it oscillates between sci-fi and 70s exploitation/women-in-prison satire.

I've read some reviews that found the changes in style jarring. I get that it's not for everyone. I assure you that [Tintin](#) and [Marmaduke](#) books still exist for those terrified to wade out further than the shallow end of the comic/graphic novel genre. Personally, I think the variety in styles, and the care taken to use them in very specific ways helps elevate this from politically fueled comic to discussion-worthy literature.

As someone not biologically similar to any non-villains in this book, I was pleased to find the heroes so identifiable and diverse. And when I use "diverse" here, I do not mean "racially diverse" or "from diverse cultures", though those are also accurate descriptions for the cast of this book, I mean the motivations of the characters, and their philosophies seem natural, as opposed to Kelly Sue DeConnick needing people with diverse philosophies to play off each other in order to move the plot along.



If there's a more beautiful book coming out from a mainstream comic publisher right now, I haven't seen it. Sana Takeda's lush, luxurious, haunting, dense, striking, and textured art lifts an already spectacular fantasy book to a-whole-nother level.

Read any review or discussion of the book, and it will undoubtedly mention how important it is that this book is in an almost entirely female-populated world. There are some cameos by men, but mostly this about the after-effects of a magical war between matriarchal societies. And while that does shift the story into places it wouldn't traditionally go if there were more genders involved, I didn't notice it while

I was reading the book.

While the nearly all-female cast is an important part of this book, it's only a small part of why this book is excellent.

In addition to the art, and the political aspect, Marjorie Liu has done a superb job building up a world of multiple-tailed cats, magic hybrid humans, old gods, and a world that mostly evolves through warfare.

It gets a little muddled and hard to follow for a few pages near the end, but that doesn't diminish any of the story that precedes those pages, nor will it keep you from wanting to read what comes next.

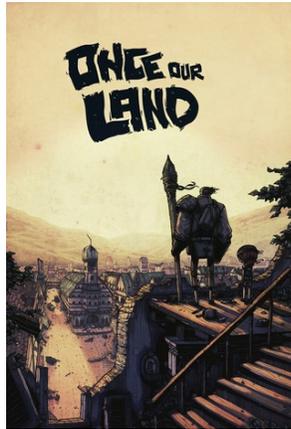
If you like fantasy or beautiful art, don't sleep on this title.



When I love the beginning of a story in a serialized format, I always fear that I will quickly grow accustomed to the way the author formats the story, how they begin and end each chapter. I fear how often I will notice their use of tropes and whether or not they try and subvert them.

Seeing the skeleton of a story is useful if you're working on criticism or learning the craft of writing, but it can be annoying if you're just trying to enjoy reading a story.

It wasn't long into volume two of Monstress that I started to notice the bones. But I didn't find them unsettling. I appreciated the way Liu draped her story over them. And I continued to be mesmerized by Sana Takeda's art.



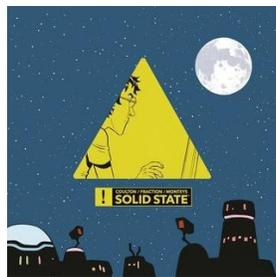
The invasion took everyone by surprise. No one knows exactly how it started. It was sudden, fast, and in the blink of an eye, it was over.

So begins the dark, and weird little horror/fantasy book, Once Our Land. After a bit of a fairy tale intro, the book shifts to an apocalyptic Germany in the 1830s, where humanity has been all but wiped out, save for one man, one little girl, and...other things.

I find most old man/young child survival stories or horror stories creepy for problematic reasons. This story features only the deliberate creepiness of monsters.

The dialog in the book is all in German, while the narration is in English. Most of the dialog is easy to follow, even if you only know German from bad 80s action films. And if it's not readily apparent from the action of the panels, the narrator usually sums up the interaction in English.

If you're looking for an out-of-the-ordinary horror story that you could easily give to an eleven year old without scarring them for life, while still being interesting enough to hold an adult's attention, this is a good choice. While the characters are definitely in peril, and the monsters are otherworldly and violent, they look more like "Aaahhh Real Monsters" than Ghoulies or Gremlins.



Matt Fraction and Jonathan Coulton's Solid State is a familiar feeling sci-fi adventure. Dystopianish future. Slang has become language. People are isolated and are slaves to their jobs. There are robots. Something goes wrong.

Unfortunately, just as I was starting to lose interest in the initial characters/scenario, we jump to a different time, with a similar story which will undoubtedly be related to the beginning of the book. I just couldn't invest myself with reading any more.

I love most of Coulton's music, and I'm a big fan of Fraction's work, so I was disappointed to not be into this. If you are a mega-Coulton fan, or you really like sci-fi tropery, this book might be for you. The story isn't challenging, so much as repetitive, and, again, the art is fantastic. Even though I didn't enjoy it, I'm glad I picked it up, so I know to look for more Albert Monteys art.



There's a scene early on in Chain Letter, where a young girl watches monsters climb down a ladder into the sewer, and wonders why she would possibly follow them down there into the unknown when there are no more monsters in the area she's currently in. She follows them down for the adventure, and to experience things she hasn't experienced before. This is precisely why you should read Pop Gun War.

The plot of this book isn't very important. It's difficult to follow in the sense that I couldn't describe to you precisely what happens and why, but it's not Distractingly Hard To Follow. You just have to go along with the weird ride.

On a scale of one to ten, the art is about a twelve. Farel Dalrymple's cartoony faces and line work are super consistent but what intrigues me so much about his art is how he chooses to use (or, sometimes, not use) colors, and how he fluctuates between panels crammed with details and spare panels with no backgrounds.

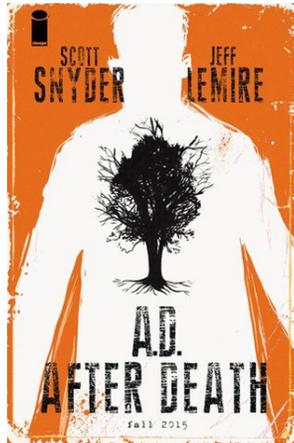
If you're looking for a weird little science-fiction book with gorgeous art, definitely pick this up.

I loathed the first two volumes of this series, and went into this envisioning me flinging the first issue dramatically across the room. Instead, I found myself impatiently waiting for the second issue.

Faust tales are pretty damned cliché in any medium, but way they've interweaved the pop culture and music references in this volume feels a lot more fluid. And while the characters aren't better people than they were in the previous two volumes, Kieron Gillen and Jamie McKelvie are better storytellers. Gillen has learned how to make these assholes begrudgingly likable, and even include some characters who are just flat out likable. And McKelvie's art is some of the best in comics.

You don't have to have read the first two volumes of Phonogram to follow this story, so I recommend picking up this first, and if you really enjoy it, pick up volume two, and if you enjoy that, as well, go back to the first volume. I don't think the series is really impacted by being read out of order.





If you have a friend who you want to get into graphic novels, but who isn't interested in reading your Sandman or X-Men collections, and who balks at Maus or Persepolis (no offense, but your friend sounds like kind of a snobby jerk), you might find Scott Snyder and Jeff Lemire's A.D. works for them. Unlike most modern comics and graphic novels, there's a great deal of prose text, in addition to the graphic elements, so they're not going to finish reading it in ten minutes.

If you're familiar with Snyder's writing or Lemire's art, there aren't any real surprises here. The combination of their arts gel really well together, but I could tell by page three that Snyder was up this typical trope of...I don't want to spoil anyone else's Snyder-reading experience but you don't have to look too close to realize that all of his stories are the same core with a few different baubles. Luckily, he's really good at writing that one story, so it's always entertaining, if you can get past that particular trope.

In addition to people who aren't into most graphic novels, I recommend this for people looking for an unusual graphic novel experience, or for people who like they're sci-fi a little more "Twilight Zone" and a little less "Battlestar Galactica".



Style is just as important to my enjoyment of a graphic novel or comic as character development and plot. If I don't enjoy how an artist draws, inks, or colors, it is difficult for me to really engage with the work. Rich Tomamso's style isn't my favorite, but sometime it makes so much sense with his stories (such as in parts of Dark Corridor) that I end up really enjoying his work.

Unfortunately, the style and the story didn't really mesh for me in She Wolf. Also, the story seemed to be made up as it went along, as opposed to planned out ahead of time. And after struggling through the first two issues, I ended up skimming the rest of it, hoping something would grab me enough to entice me back into the story. But nothing did.

It's a very convoluted Buffy-level horrorish story about a female werewolfish changeling who has high school struggles and ends up meeting some vampires at a club. At its best moments, it's a bad episode of the American version of "Being Human", at its worst, it's an indecipherable mess



“How do you feel about myths?” Ales Kot asks on the first page of Wolf. It’s a vague question. It’s like asking “How do you feel about food?” or “What’s your opinion on houses?” It depends on the quality.

Ales Kot is a bit of a mythical character in comics, himself. He seemed to be putting out an issue a week of his various stories from 2013-2015 and then he just disappeared. Even his Tumblr just stops in October 2015. While I wasn’t smitten with all of his work, including Wolf, he is definitely a talented writer, pushing the envelope in how he told stories. Sometimes the envelope he was pushing was shredded at the edges and inexplicably damp, but I

still wanted to know what was inside.

I hate to call this book Hellblazer in LA, it’s too easy a comparison. I picked up a handful of books from my non-superhero comic shelf tonight, and five of them have ended up being focused on blood and magic, all of them owing something to the success of Vertigo’s Hellblazer series (not so much the current DC iteration). What I found most annoying about this book were the character names. The characters themselves were ok, except for the perfectly imagined Freddy Chtonic, but some of the quirks, such as the character who used “f”s in place of “r”s seemed overly contrived.

Matt Taylor’s drawings are fantastic. He does some great facial expression work, and Lee Loughridge’s colors are on-trend with their muted colors and selected palettes.

I just wasn’t excited by this book. The pacing felt off in several places, and, again, the names and some of the character quirks really annoyed me, but there were some moments of real promise.



There’s not much to say about this book other than that it is a brilliant and wonderfully told wordless, duotone book about fear, death, and monsters. If anyone ever argues that you can’t have a coherent graphic novel without words, hand them this book. If they continue arguing with you, they aren’t a person you need in your life.





I am a long time fan of Kurt Busiek, and this is an incredibly engaging and well-paced story, but this is a five star book because Benjamin Dewey's art is flawless. It's also lush, gorgeous, detailed, imaginative, and intense. It helps that it's colored by Jordie Bellaire who is, if not the best colorist currently working in comics, certainly one of the top three.

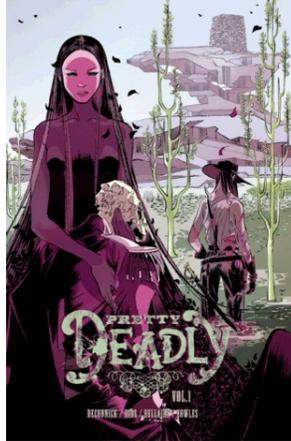
I don't usually start with the art unless the story is bad, and the story is excellent, but I'll get to that. One of the stars of Dewey's art is the way he uses lines in this book. The panel lines, when they're used, look hand drawn, as opposed to an artist fitting their work into a precise frame. That, coupled with the two page spread title pages, which each include a few paragraphs of prose, give this collection a more storybook feel than most graphic novels. There's also the thickness and varying colors of the lines he uses to draw the characters. Usually, I only notice the thickness of lines when they're done improperly. But in Autumnlands, they seem just as important parts of this story as the dialog.

If Busiek phoned in a vague outline of this story and it accompanied this level of art, this would still be a four star book. But the story is also magnificent. The world is possibly the future of our world where a variety of animals have evolved to be the dominant life form, as there are no humans. There is definitely a class struggle, which figures hugely in the plot, but most of the different types of animals seem integrated, so that a gathering of wizards in the city where the story begins includes dogs, various birds, warthogs, giraffes, lizards, horses, frogs, raccoons, you name it.

The classes are separated by many things, but magic is a huge part of it, and magic appears to be dwindling, so a plot is hatched to resurrect a champion from the days before magic, to return magic to the world. The problem being, everyone's lore has the champion belonging to their species, so nobody knows precisely what's going to happen should they manage to summon them.

Tragedy strikes. Lines are drawn. Enemies of the city attack. A pompous upper class moron seizes power in a very Trump-like fashion. And it's up to a child and the summoned champion to save everyone.

If this story had ended on the final page, and there had been no volume two, it would still be a five star book. There's no cliffhanger, per se, but as soon as I finished reading it the first time, I couldn't wait to get my hands on volume two. Now that a couple of years have passed, and volume two is out, I've reread it, and it was just as fun to re-experience.



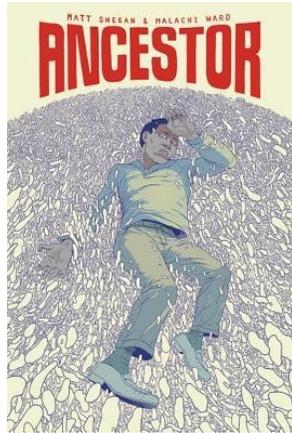
Sometimes, when a comic series or graphic novel has beautiful art but a complex narrative, I see people describe it as “poetic”. “Poetic” meaning “hard to understand”, apparently.

I’ve spent the last twenty years studying poetry, and find that if I can’t follow something, it’s not that it’s too fancy or intellectual for me, it’s often just not accessible. Sometimes it’s overwrought, sometimes the writer had particular images in mind and wanted the audience to draw their own conclusions, sometimes I think the writer just isn’t experienced to tell their story.

Kelly Sue DeConnick and Emma Ríos are both experienced, talented creators whose work I enjoy. Thus, I imagine the enigmatic way *Pretty Deadly* unfolds is done very purposefully, and by the completion of the story, it will all make sense. When the series concludes I may come back and read it all at once and see if everything falls into place, but as an introduction to an ongoing title, the story didn’t hold my interest enough to pick up volume two. Even now, two years later, upon rereading it, I didn’t really connect with any part of the narrative.

The story is a western-themed exploration of mythology with a bit of horror thrown in. Oh, and a touch of manga influence. It’s not impossible to follow, it just doesn’t hold to conventional narrative tropes, which is something I usually love, but didn’t grab me here.

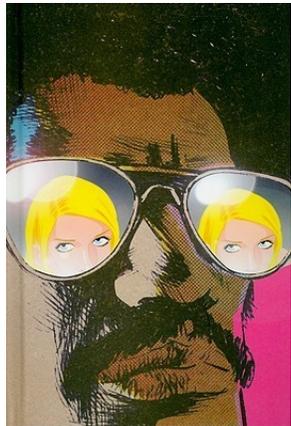
The art, on the other hand, is just beautiful, from the character designs to the changing colors of the panel frames. If Ríos and Jordie Bellaire’s part of this collaboration hadn’t been so strong, I’m not sure I would have given this series a second chance.



I wasn't familiar with either Matt Sheehan or Malachi Ward until I saw the first part of Ancestor in Brandon Graham and Emma Ríos's "Island" anthology. I will now eagerly snatch up anything either of them work on.

Ancestor is a sci-fi fantasy story that touches on technology, false idol worship, and the nature of art among other things. And, somehow, it never seems smug or condescending.

I advise going into this knowing nearly nothing. Every time I grew comfortable with the narrative direction of the book, it took a sharp turn. In lesser hands, this story would have been a mess, but it's paced perfectly so that I never felt lost. I was aware that, although I was following the same characters, I was in a very different story than I was a few pages ago. It's one of the most fun, unexpected reading experiences I've had in quite a while.



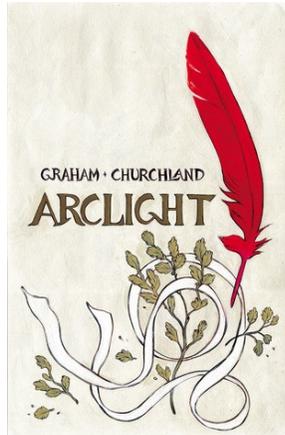
I really enjoy the idea of viewing the genre of superhero comics through the lens of Blacksploitation. And, artistically, Afrodisiac LOOKS amazing. Brian Maruca's art is flawless from cover to cover.

BUT

at the end of the day, this is two straight White dudes writing blacksploitation superhero stories. And it doesn't work.

I probably would have found it incredibly funny if I'd read it in the 90s, but reading it in 2017 was cringe-inducing. The jokes about converting lesbians and writing the dialog in dialect just doesn't sit well on the page.

If you removed all the words and had it as an art book, it would be five stars. But even though I didn't know Jim Rugg or Maruca's race when I started reading it, it didn't take even a full page to think "There's no way this was written by someone who isn't White."



I used to work in a comic book store that mainly sold superhero comics and the Vertigo line, with some of the top selling Image titles. Every once in a great while, an employee would manage to convince the owner to order something less mainstream. I found some of my favorite comics this way, including Brandon Graham's "King City".

I now work for a store that sells a much wider range of comics, and Brandon Graham's work sells really well for us. I was sad to hear that his anthology series "Island" was cancelled, as our store has more subscribers to "Island" than we do for "Superman".

When Arclight's first issue came out (which was under the title "8house"), I read it with a couple of friends and we all agreed that Marian Churchland's artwork was gorgeous, and that we had no idea what was going on in the story but we all trusted Graham. I had a similar reaction when Graham's reboot of Prophet came out. I've read the full run, and there have been many times where I've had no idea what was happening, but enjoyed the story all the same. I'm likely to spend a day rereading the whole series at once to see if what I missed in the initial read.

I'm sad to say I won't be doing the same with Arclight. I just finished reading it, and had no idea it was finished when the story concluded. There were enough pages of sketches and artwork in the back, that I assumed it was an entire other issue which contained some sort of narrative conclusion. But there's nothing. This is a beautiful tapestry hung on a flimsy clothesline. And for some people that will be ok. I didn't find it infuriating. I didn't throw the book across the room, dramatically. (is there any other way to throw a book, even if it's covered in wasps?) I just put it down, disappointed. I didn't have a feel for a single character in the entire book. If one of them wasn't named Arclight, I wouldn't be able to name a character in the entire book. I don't know what anyone's motivations were, I don't know the relations between the death priests and the non-death priests were, why people were using blood magic. Who was friends with whom. Who was royalty. What purpose blood had in any of the magic. Why they bothered including three translations of glyphs that didn't appear anywhere in the story.

If there had been anything other than the art to latch on to, I might have gone back and reread it. As it is, I'll keep it on my art book shelf, imagining it's just a series of beautiful illustrations that nobody bothered to write a script for.



I was a big fan of Brandon Graham's anthology series "Island" that Image comics put out over the last nearly two years. Unfortunately, I didn't get a chance to read each issue, so I've tried to order all the trade paperback collections of the stories that "Island" originally serialized.

Habitat is a sci-fi story about classism, the struggle between brain and heart, and your classic hero's journey as it takes place in one of those dystopian future-like places (it could be an alternate dimension or another planet, it's not clear, and doesn't matter for the story, but it looks like how many European artists have expressed dystopian futures on Earth).

The main problem with the story is that, while it's constantly in motion, it never actually goes anywhere. It's the reading equivalent of walking on a treadmill. I find this a common problem in stories written by people who are mainly known as visual artists: they sketch out a plot, but don't make any interesting characters to propel the story forward. I would have liked to root for the blank-slate protagonist but there weren't any characters around him that had enough depth or interesting motivation to propel me to keep reading.

The story also just seemed to stop, as opposed to resolve.

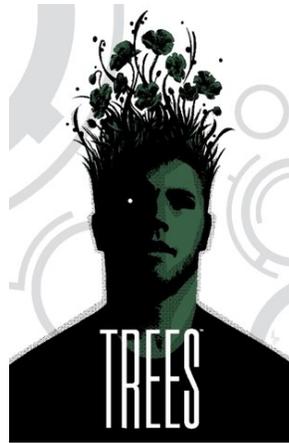
Simon Roy's art is heavily influenced by 2000AD, so if you're a fan of that particular style of art, you may want to flip through this book and see if it appeals to you more than it did to me.

Truly, the Marmaduke of comics about comic conventions. I could often see where the creators thought it would be humorous but I could also see the point where they should have realized it wasn't funny.

Initially, I was going to cut it some slack because it's an all-ages book, but while the jokes are in no way offensive or risqué (or funny) they all depend on references that kids wouldn't get. So I don't understand who makes up the target audience for this book.

Chris Giarrusso and Scoot McMahon's art is great but utterly wasted on the material.





Describing the contents of this book in review form does a great disservice to the story.

Trees is Warren Ellis's story of how the world copes with change when they don't understand what led to the change, nor what the long term effects of the change will be. This is both the conceit of the major plot points of the story, as well as every character's personal narrative.

Ellis looks at gender, economy, political ambition, scientific reasoning, from a variety of angles as the story unfolds in six different cities with six vastly different sets of characters. Yet, no matter how quickly Ellis jumped from Italy to Brazil to Somalia, I never felt lost in the story. Part of this is Jason Howard's distinct color palettes. He doesn't align each city with a color scheme, but there is always a change in hues when the story shifts locations.

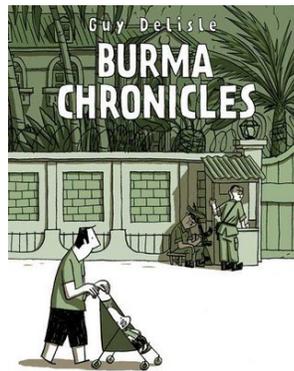
If you're looking for a smart, character driven sci-fi story that focuses more on ensembles of characters rather than one protagonist, this is probably the best you can ever hope for.



Most of what I loved about volume one of Warren Ellis's Trees was the sprawling nature of the story. The constant shifting between parts of the world and how they were reacting to the Trees.

In volume two, we focus on two minor characters from volume one and how their world's are impacted.

While it's still an interesting story, I don't care as much about these characters as I did about the previous batch, even though we get to spend more time with them. Part of it might be the pacing. If the story is going to slow down, then I want to either know more about the trees or else get to see more of the characters really challenging themselves and their motivations. I didn't get that in this volume, but will absolutely pick up volume three, in hopes that it returns to the form of volume one.



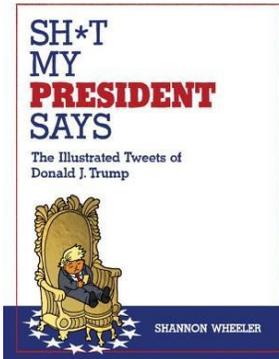
I can't always go on vacation. So, sometimes, when I'm wishing I could be at a theme park, or white water rafting, or playing dodgeball with sea lions, I go to Youtube and watch Point Of View videos by people having the experiences I want to be having. And sometimes, I go to Youtube and watch Point Of View videos of things I never want to do, like freebase jumping off of skyscrapers, bicycling down sheer cliffs into piles of rocks, or ride a wooden rollercoaster near an active volcano.

Guy Delisle's books give me a similar feeling. Only, instead of a thrill ride, I am experiencing what it is like to be a cartoonist father constantly moving to different countries in need of medical aid. It's not a life I would choose, but I have also read a lot of Batman books for someone who's glad his parents are still alive, and has no desire to put on a cape and fight crime at night.

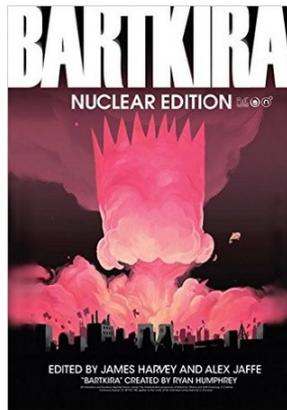
This collection takes place in Myanmar (the actual name of Burma for the past 28 years), where Delisle's wife, a doctor with Médecins Sans Frontières (similar to The United States's Doctors Without Borders).

What I love about this, and many of Delisle's other memoirs about living in various countries, is that the Stranger In A Strange Land is present, but it's not the driving force of the narrative. Similarly, the politics of the regions come into play, as they affect his life, but they never overwhelm the memoir. Delisle is not here to give you the complete, unbiased history of a controversial country, he's merely telling you what his time in the country was like, with a minimum of history to explain how the country came to be that way.

Unlike most American versions of memoir, there's rarely unnecessary melodrama. You'll spend two pages reading about how the internet was down, and then five or six pages about a water festival that the author enjoys on the first day but grows exhausted by as it continues. It's not something a hyperbolic reviewer would call a "page turner" but I also never found it boring, and I sometimes have a difficult time focusing on non-fiction travelogues.



Shannon Wheeler is one of my favorite cartoonists. Tr*mp is not one of my favorite presidents. The idea of taking The Commander In Tweet's statements and adding satirical cartoons sounds fantastic. And there are a couple of these that worked really well. But at the end of the day, the cartoons weren't satirical enough to make up for having to read the Tweets again.



You probably don't think you need a mash up of "The Simpsons" and Akira in your life, but you're wrong. So wrong.

This Very Abridged retelling of Akira features the art of several different artists. It's not a perfect retelling. It's not meant to seem fully complete. It's a bunch of artists taking a theme and donating their time for charity.

The result is jaw dropping. Every page turn of this book leads to an astounding work of art. Springfield getting absolutely levelled really works in this book, and the characters the various artists focus on feels fun. By the end, I wanted to go back and reread Akira, and then read this collection again.

It didn't make me want to watch "The Simpsons", but it didn't make me Not Want to watch "The Simpsons", either.



The best science fiction stories, whether short stories, novels, or graphic novels, don't bother spending any time setting up a new world or mythology for the reader, they throw them in the middle of a story where society and mythology are organically explained through the story or stories. There are, of course, exceptions, but for the most part I want to start with Darth Vader and a battalion of stormtroopers shooting and force choking their way through a ship of rebels, instead of an explanation of how the empire came to power, and what their long term goals are.

Rick Remender always starts the moments before the stormtroopers strike. But he always does so masterfully.

There are some pages of prose narrative, including the first couple of pages of the first issue. If you skip them, you won't be lost in the story, but Remender's prose is some of the finer, less didactic prose to come out of writers mainly known for their comic and graphic novel work.

All the cool tropes of modern sci-fi are here: a dying protagonist, a promise of cure, a dubious villain who answers to someone higher, family tragedy, giant horrible monsters. They all fit together into a very intriguing story that is fast-paced without seeming frenetic. I always knew what was happening, but couldn't always guess what was about to happen.

Jerome Opeña, who also worked with Remender on the incredibly fun Fear Agent, collaborates with him here, and the combination of his drawings and Matt Hollingsworth's colors give this book an almost "2000 AD"/European feel that gels well with the story. It is sometimes a bit too dark for me (visually, not story-wise) but that's a minor quibble.

I'm very excited to see where the story goes in volume two.



Reviews that reduce a piece of art to an amalgam of other pieces of art are a wallop of the final season of “American Idol” with a smidgen of “Glee” thrown in. So, tone deaf, autotuned, poorly conceived and unjustly sensationalized.

Plutona is what would happen if Brian Michael Bendis’s Powers took place in Stephen King’s It, if “Stranger Things” took place during “Fantastic Four #286”. It’s the inverse of Runaways meets Stand By Me. It is all and none of these things.

It’s a coming of age tale that follows King’s trope of a group of kids with different traumas intersecting when they accidentally discover an unrelated trauma. In this case, a dead superhero. It benefits from spending the least amount of time possible exploring the superhero part of the story, instead focusing on the interpersonal relationships between a bully, two unrelated outcasts, a rebellious youth who hangs out with an outcast, and a younger brother who nobody pays attention to when they don’t have to.

Emi Lenox does most of the art (there are a few panels that are definitely Jeff Lemire and it’s as perfect and important to the story as the stylization is to the aforementioned “Stranger Things”. It’s very Matt Kindt does “Codename: Kids Next Door” in a way that is clearly neither of those things.

The character development feels very real in the 1980s teen movie genre, and the story moves quickly but never leaves the audience behind. This could have easily been a twelve issue series that dragged in the middle, so kudos to Lemire and Lenox for figuring out the correct length. The only thing keeping this from a five star book was the ending, which hinted at a more superheroey future for some of the characters, while not giving resolution to Something I Won’t Spoil. But that’s a nitpick. This was mostly a fantastic read.



If the CW had a show about teenage time-traveling and dimension hopping teenagers in love, it would probably be something like this. The characters are fantastic. I especially enjoy that one of the leads is a trans character but that isn't Who The Character Is. They are an adventurer totally in love with their adventuring partner, and, apart from a couple of scenes in the beginning where they argue with, first their parents, then an obnoxious teen, to let the reader know that the character is trans, they let the character just be a character. There should be more of that in comics and other media.

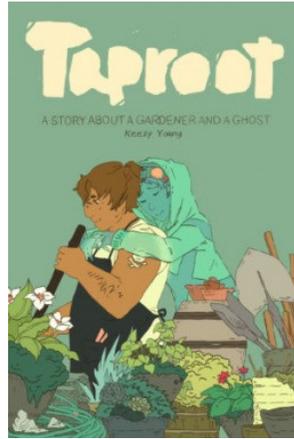
The story just kind of happens. It's not great art or a metaphor or even a well-fleshed out world. The reviews I've read that complain about how the main characters don't seem to be very sciency, and how the science in the world isn't ever explained are correct. I just, as a reader, didn't care. I wasn't reading it expecting some in-depth mythology. This was just a fun rompy adventure comic with interesting characters.



Whether it's Johnny Boo, American Elf, or SuperF*ckers, you pretty much know what you're going to get out of a James Kochalka book.

This story about two friends on the verge of graduating high school is nearly sweet (which is the most you want from an adult Kochalka book). There's unexpected plot twists (but nothing that would get you a "Law & Order" CHA-CHUNK), there is a total jerkface teen who thinks he's the hero

but is actually awful, a mecha suit, and a ton of fun involving, possibly, a bear.



I'm excited that we live in a time where there are more options for comic readers, particularly that there are more all-ages books that are queer-friendly and/or that don't confine themselves to the gender binary.

I also appreciate that the work that the non-gender binary graphic novels that come out are allowed to be as mediocre and inconsistent as traditional all-ages stories. I don't say that to be cruel, I believe that the willingness of publishers to release non-traditional stories that Aren't Great Literature is important to diffuse the cis-white adventuring teenagers who took up all the shelf space in the All-

Ages books section in the previous centuries.

Taproot is fine. It's a cute story about a ghost in love with a living gardener of the same gender. The art is on par with a decent webcomic. There aren't any panels that I wanted to linger on because they were awesome or because they sucked.

The story is also fine. Occasionally, I felt like I missed a page, to the point where I was licking my fingers trying to separate non-existent pages. I never didn't understand what was happening, I just felt there were snatches of dialog missing, but it turns out it's just clunky. Which, again, is fine. I never threw up my hands or shook my head at the book, it just felt like it needed another round of editing to make it more coherent.

I would recommend it to people looking for more inclusive all-ages book (it's not only queer-friendly, it also centers on non-white characters), people who appreciate hokey teen romance, fans of low-stakes supernatural adventure, and teachers looking to include more inclusive graphic novels in their classroom. While it is by no means perfect, it is the kind of book that should be available to kids who aren't often published to. When I was a kid, I loved some terrible books, and they became important to me, and got me reading other books. This book is Much Better Than Terrible, and could be a great resource to pull in young readers who might not see themselves represented in most all-ages books. Oh, and I would also recommend it to angsty teenage ghosts, though they certainly have a wide-array of YA books published to them.



Have you been looking for an all ages book featuring a mostly Black cast, an ice cream truck, robot aliens, hip-hop, and cats. Well, it's finally Your Year.

Sci-Fu is a fun book, if you can stomach 80s style raps as written in the voice of young teenagers. It's silly, beautifully drawn, and perfectly colored. My one issue is that the "terrible" "worst rap ever" is really the same quality as the rest of the rap in the book that's supposed to be "the best ever", but that might be a deliberate joke on the author's part. Even if it isn't, it didn't detract from my enjoyment of the story.



More than a sports comics than a queer comic, Fence is a really cool look at classism in sports, and interpersonal relationships between a variety of people. There isn't one villain, or one group of villains vs. one person you're rooting for, nor is there one person you're rooting for vs. everyone else, there's a nice web of interactions filled with people with various levels of flaws.

Not only are the story and the art great, but the design of the trade is wonderful. They don't separate the issues out like they do in most trades, it's one continuous story. Interestingly, there isn't even a section in the back with all the covers, which is fine, as the covers for the series have all

looked good, but the story and the interior art are the real draws for this series. There's a very minimal use of manga tropes (the single tear when someone is stressed, the lack of eyeballs when they're shocked) which enhance the story instead of overwhelming it.

READ MORE COMICS!
THEY'RE GOOD FOR YOU!

