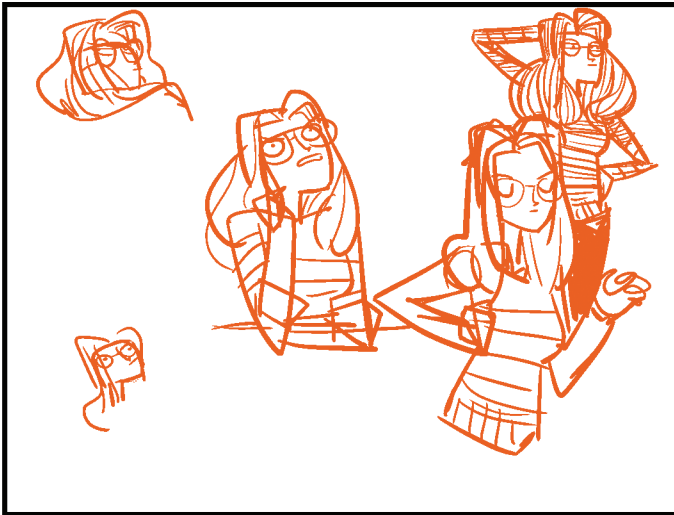
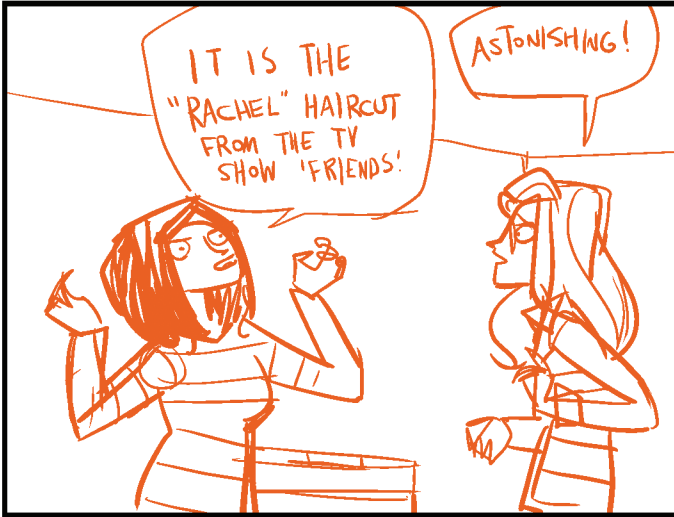


BOBBINS

JOHN ALLISON

2016





BOBBINS VOLUME 1: 2016

Written and drawn by John Allison

Published October 2016

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A NOTE

“Bobbins” was my first daily comic strip. It ran from 1998 to 2002, and it’s where I learned how to tell stories and make characters work. The strips look rough beyond belief to me now, but I still have a lot of affection for them, affection that goes beyond their route-one gags and silly plots. If at least a few thousand people hadn’t liked them, I wouldn’t be typing this sentence now. Or if I was, I wouldn’t be typing it with the expectation that anyone would read it.

The original Bobbins strips will never make it into print; the original high resolution files are lost. Even the comics on the website are shrinking, their turn-of-the-century dimensions miniscule compared to modern web graphics. But these crude early works are ground zero for all the comics I’ve made since, the roots of characters and a location that I’m still exploring 18 years on.

Around Christmas 2014, I came up with an idea for an art project called “Bobbins In Reverse”, where I would redraw all the original comics with my left hand, slowly improving, echoing the way my art improved over the first years of working on the comic, and creating an archive. Bobbins In Reverse never happened, because it was a clever idea that represented a lot of very boring work. I took the idea out into the yard, and shot it.

But I was still interested in revisiting my first comics, and replacing the

near-obselete early strips. I know cartoonists who have redrawn their earliest work - sometimes multiple times - and I didn’t want to do that. There was nothing about my early body of work that made me want to resurrect it. On the other hand, reading through it for the first time in years, I could see all the places where the germ of an idea had landed on rock rather than good soil.

I knew little about life in my early twenties, blithely ignoring the glaring issue at hand for some wacky (nay, *zany*) turnaround, because I didn’t know how to approach characters’ internal lives and motivations.

So I painstakingly went through the first two years of Bobbins strips - about 500 - and drew a map of everything that happened, where everyone lived, all the characters, including some who only appeared in one or two panels, and some who weren’t introduced until years later, but would have been around right at the start. Then I tried to work out stories that could have happened *between* the extant comics from 1998 and 1999. Some of it was already there on the old pages. Some of it fell into place. A lot of it I made up anew.

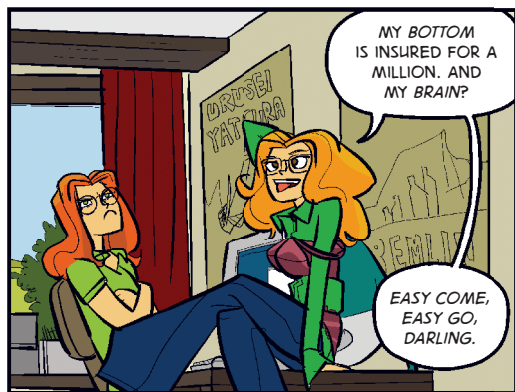
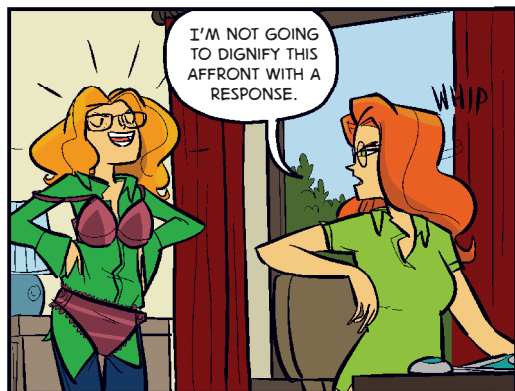
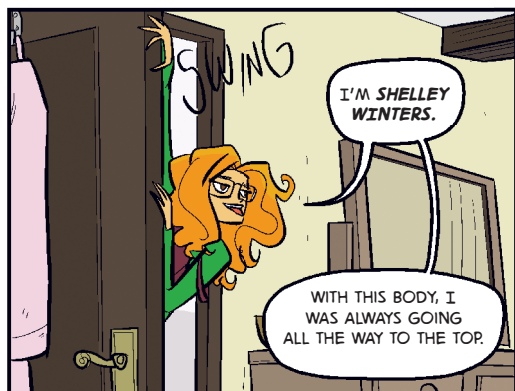
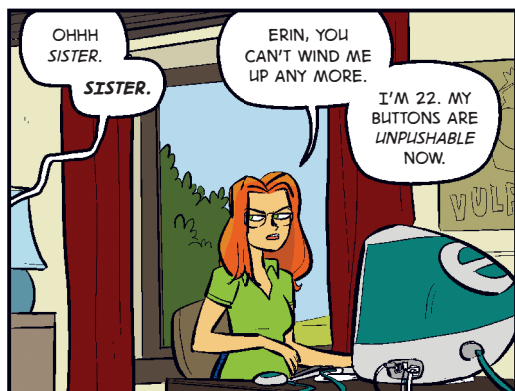
In some ways it may be a more foolish project than recreating my earliest work with my left hand. Doing that wouldn’t have taken all this explanation. Hopefully it makes for better comics. I doubt it could be worse.

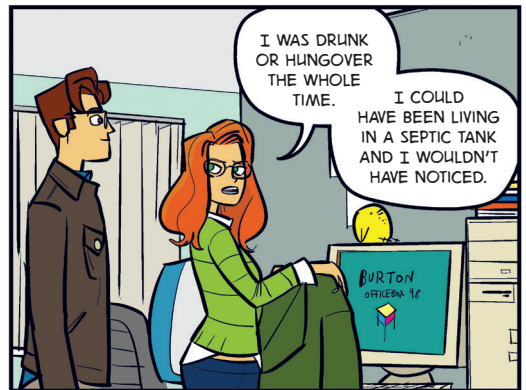
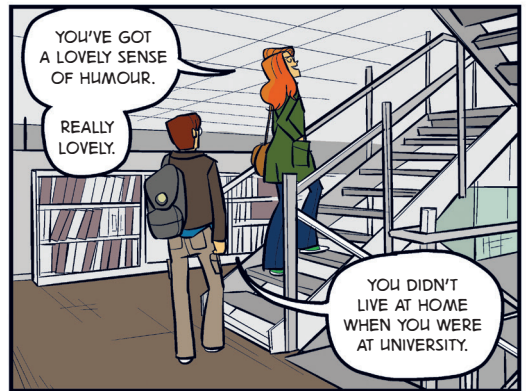
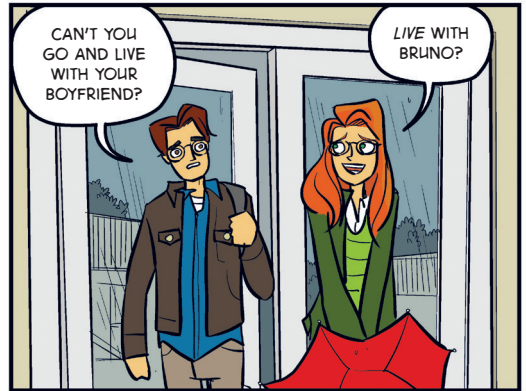
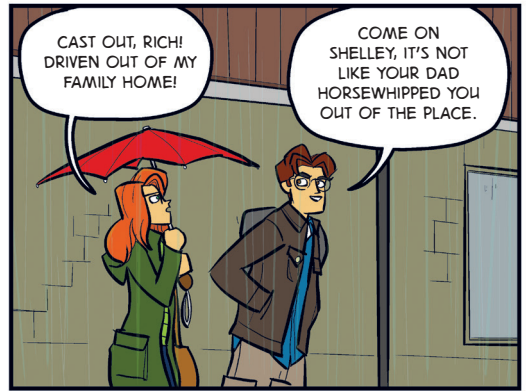
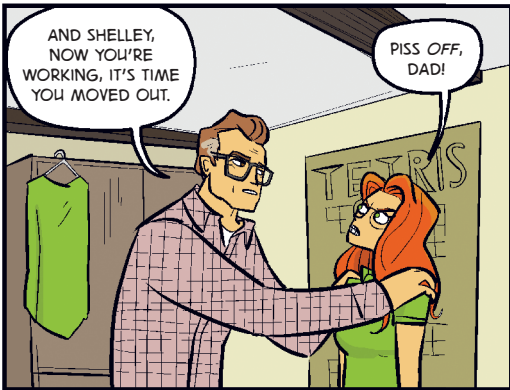
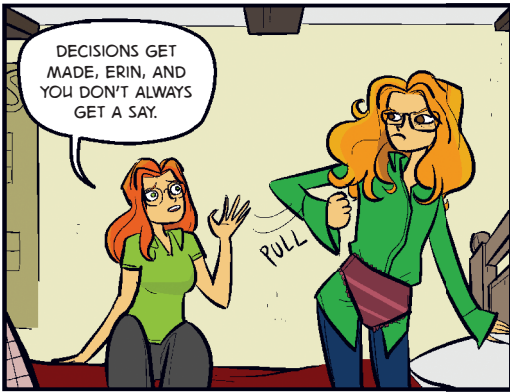
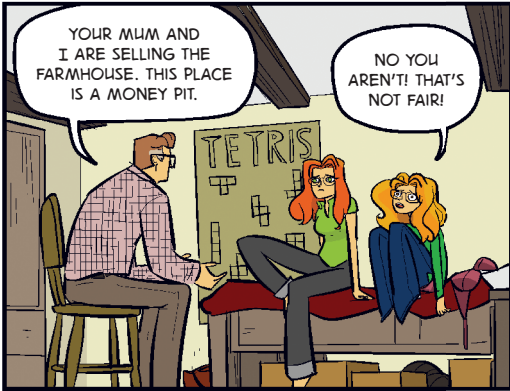
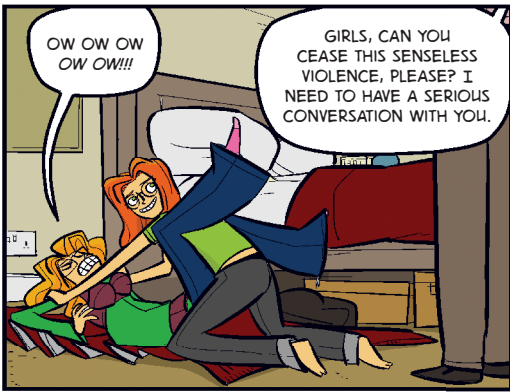
EXODUS

I set myself a few simple rules for the project. The comics would be gag strips, like the original Bobbins (which I'd originally hoped to sell as a syndicated strip), in a fixed format. I decided to use the Japanese "yonkoma" 4-panel format, as I'd got into the habit of slicing horizontal, western style comics strips into thinner and thinner slices to create dialogue beats. The downside of *yonkoma* is that it's designed for vertical lettering, so a horizontal speech bubble truncates the space available for the characters. It took me a few weeks to work out the best ways to proportion and move characters around in this limited space.

The other rule was that I had to stay true to the basic sitcom constraints of the first hundred or so 1998/99 pages. No magical realism. Bobbins was sometimes a little bawdy, and that had to stay too.

"Exodus" is set just a little before the start of the original Bobbins comic, where Shelley Winters has already moved out of the family home. Her father manifested in one early comic, but her mother wouldn't appear until 2014's *Expecting To Fly* (a story about her teenage years). Her sister Erin took seven years to appear. All we knew about Shelley for a long time was that she "grew up in the country". This far-distant idyll grew closer to the town with the passing years, and now probably represents, at worst, a twenty minute drive.

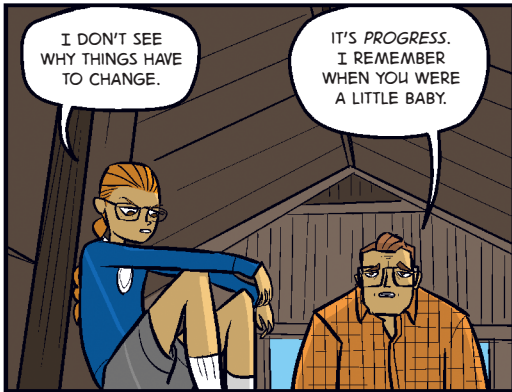






ERIN, ARE YOU IN HERE?

YES. WITH THE FERAL CATS. I'M ONE OF THEM NOW.



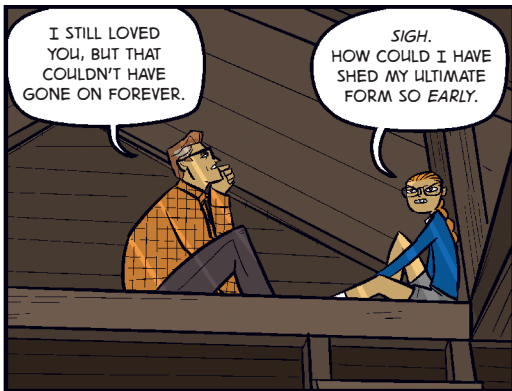
I DON'T SEE WHY THINGS HAVE TO CHANGE.

IT'S PROGRESS. I REMEMBER WHEN YOU WERE A LITTLE BABY.



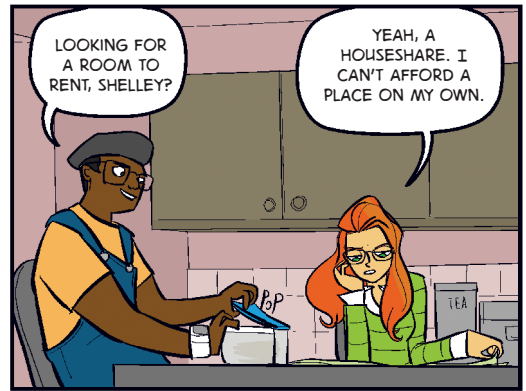
YOU'D SMILE THE BIGGEST SMILE AT ME, AND I'D PICK YOU UP...

...AND WITHOUT FAIL, YOU'D DELIVER A RIBBON OF PERFECT WHITE SICK ONTO ME.



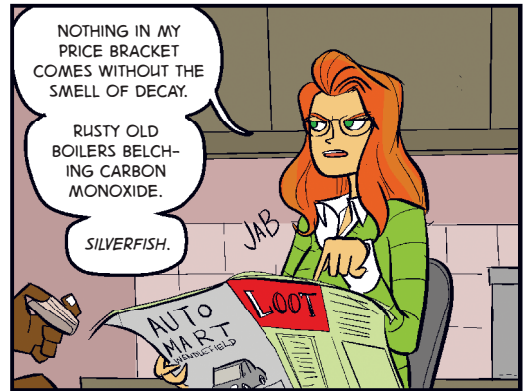
I STILL LOVED YOU, BUT THAT COULDN'T HAVE GONE ON FOREVER.

SIGH. HOW COULD I HAVE SHED MY ULTIMATE FORM SO EARLY.



LOOKING FOR A ROOM TO RENT, SHELLEY?

YEAH, A HOUSESHARE. I CAN'T AFFORD A PLACE ON MY OWN.

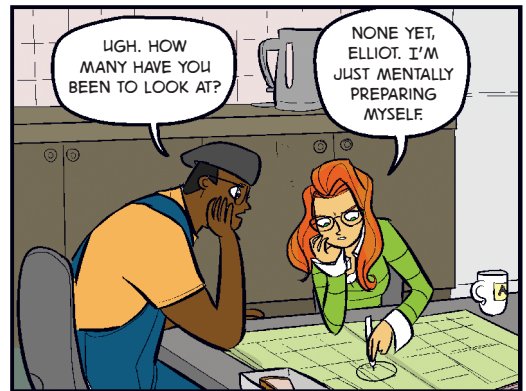


NOTHING IN MY PRICE BRACKET COMES WITHOUT THE SMELL OF DECAY.

RUSTY OLD BOILERS BELCHING CARBON MONOXIDE.

SILVERFISH.

JAB



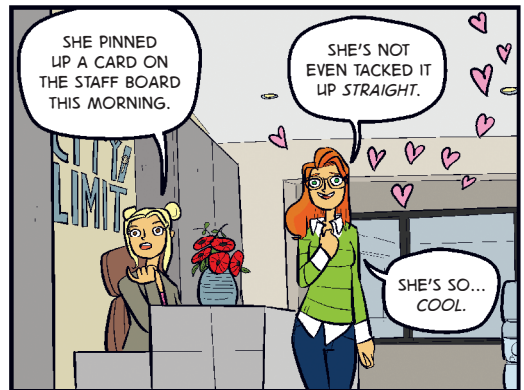
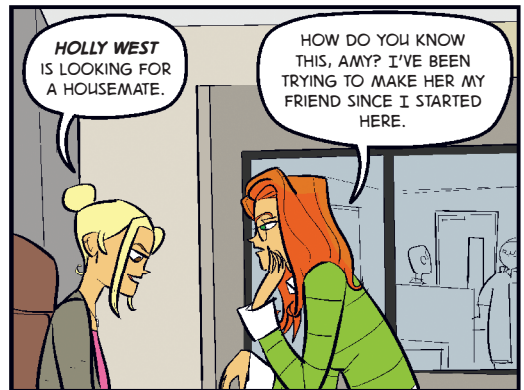
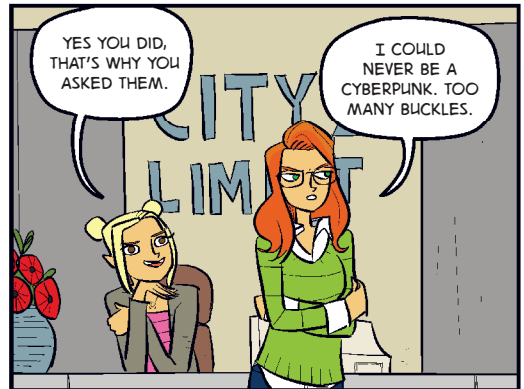
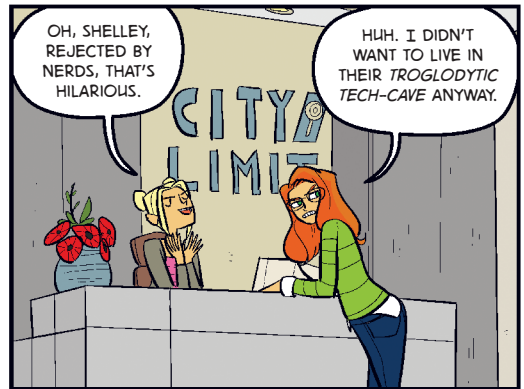
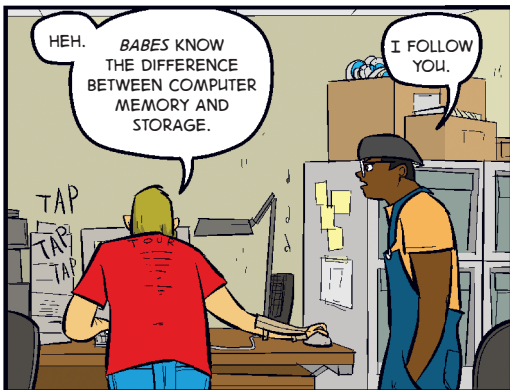
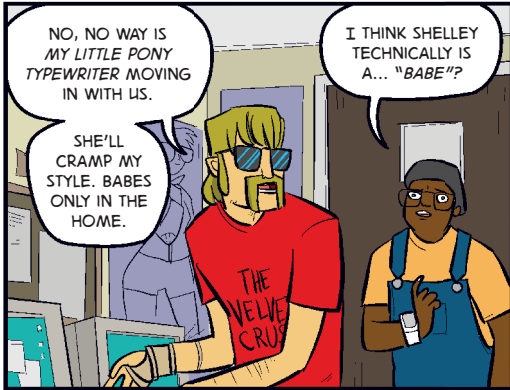
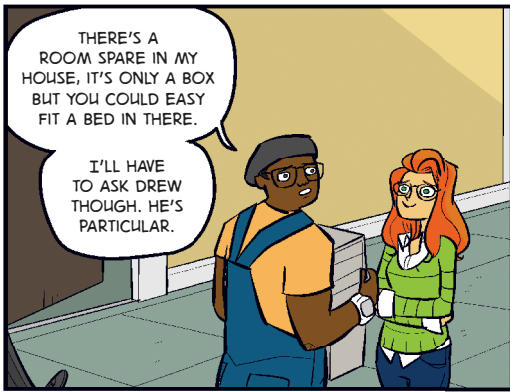
UGH. HOW MANY HAVE YOU BEEN TO LOOK AT?

NONE YET, ELLIOT. I'M JUST MENTALLY PREPARING MYSELF.



OVERLOOKING THE PARK, ZOO A MONTH. SOUNDS NICE!

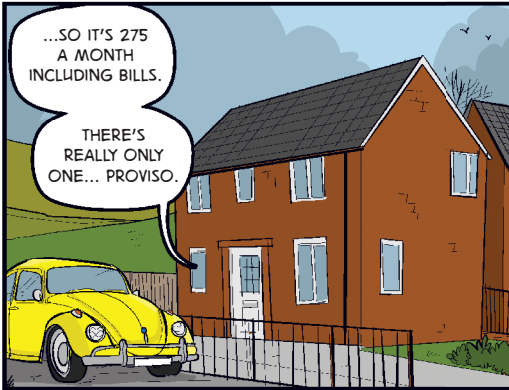
DO YOU KNOW WHAT ELSE OVERLOOKS PARKS? GUYS WITH MEATHOOKS FOR HANDS.





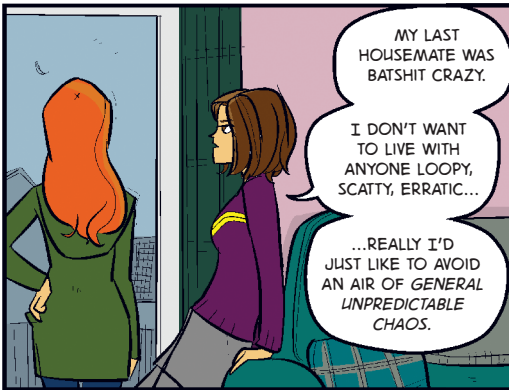
YOU'RE INTERESTED IN TAKING THE ROOM? POP ROUND AFTER WORK, I'LL SHOW YOU THE PLACE.

YES YES! SEE YOU THERE, HOLLY!



...SO IT'S 275 A MONTH INCLUDING BILLS.

THERE'S REALLY ONLY ONE... PROVISO.



MY LAST HOUSEMATE WAS BATSHIT CRAZY.

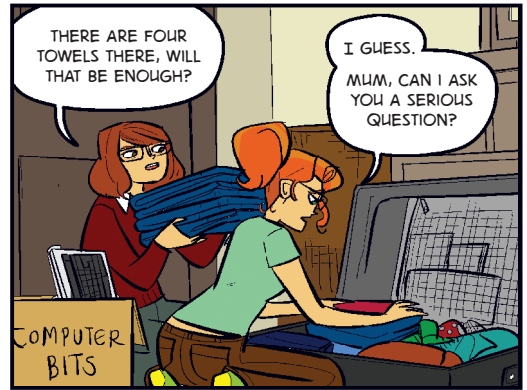
I DON'T WANT TO LIVE WITH ANYONE LOOPY, SCATTY, ERRATIC...

...REALLY I'D JUST LIKE TO AVOID AN AIR OF GENERAL UNPREDICTABLE CHAOS.



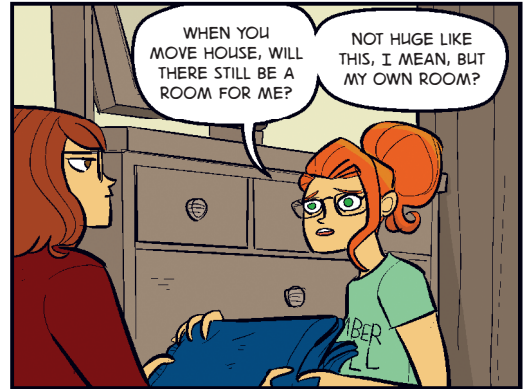
MY HOBBIES ARE TIDYING UP AND PRAYER.

ON OCCASION I TREAT MYSELF TO A CUP OF HOT WATER.



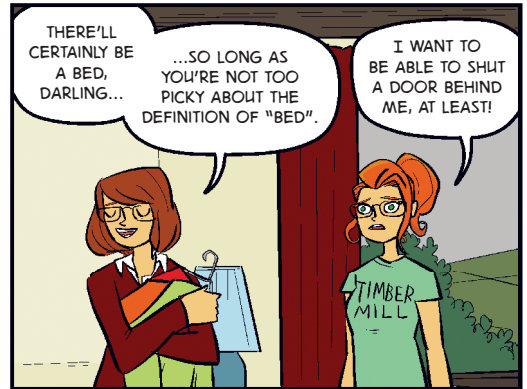
THERE ARE FOUR TOWELS THERE, WILL THAT BE ENOUGH?

I GUESS. MUM, CAN I ASK YOU A SERIOUS QUESTION?



WHEN YOU MOVE HOUSE, WILL THERE STILL BE A ROOM FOR ME?

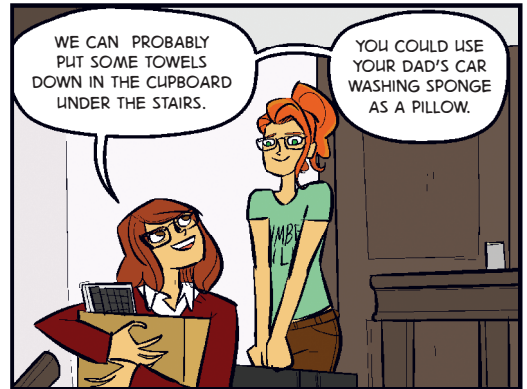
NOT HUGE LIKE THIS, I MEAN, BUT MY OWN ROOM?



THERE'LL CERTAINLY BE A BED, DARLING...

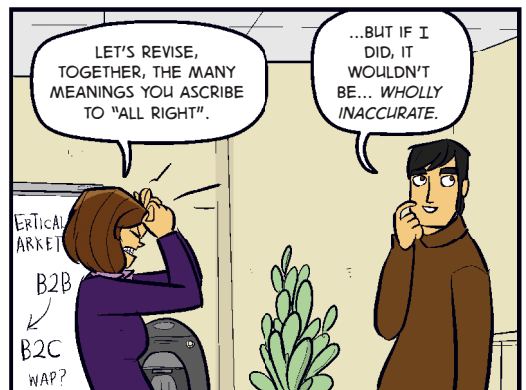
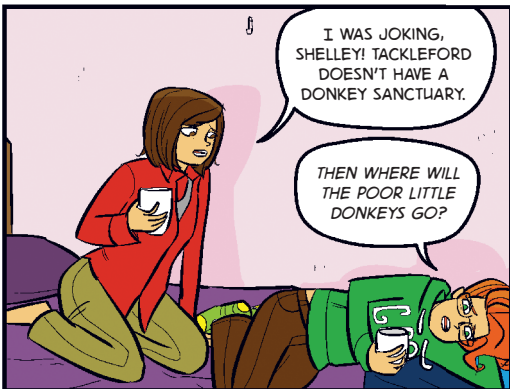
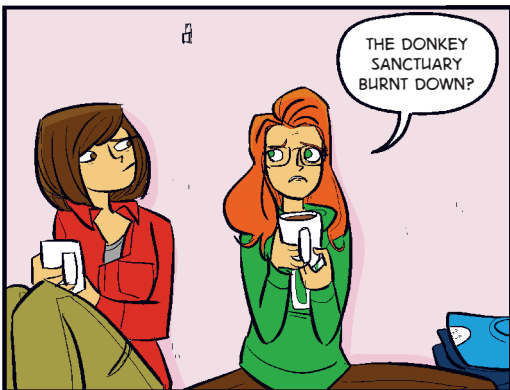
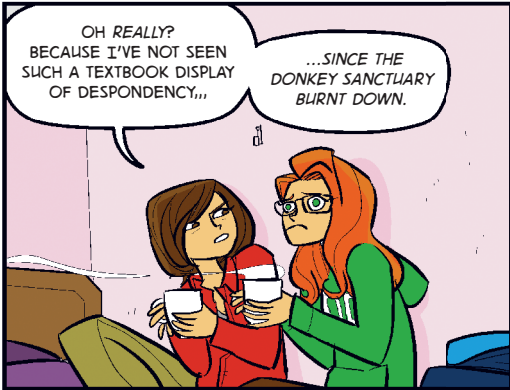
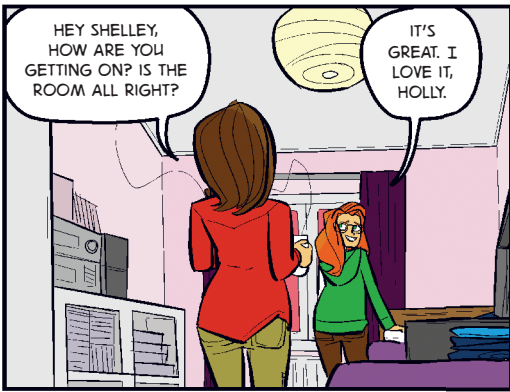
...SO LONG AS YOU'RE NOT TOO PICKY ABOUT THE DEFINITION OF "BED".

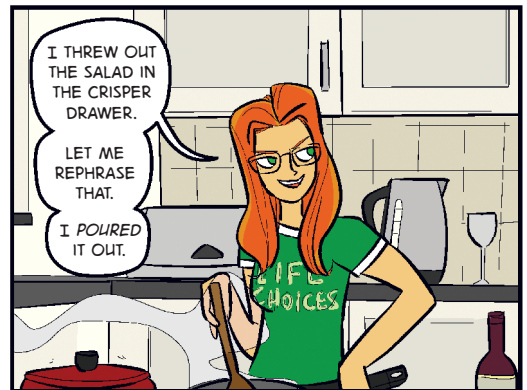
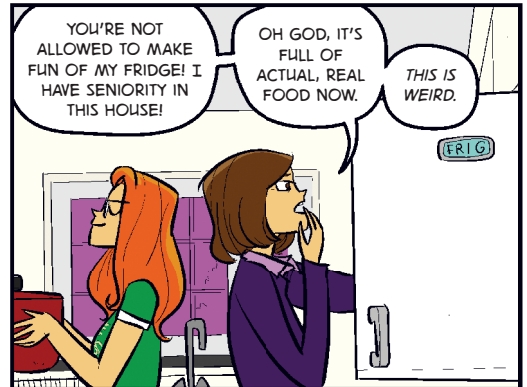
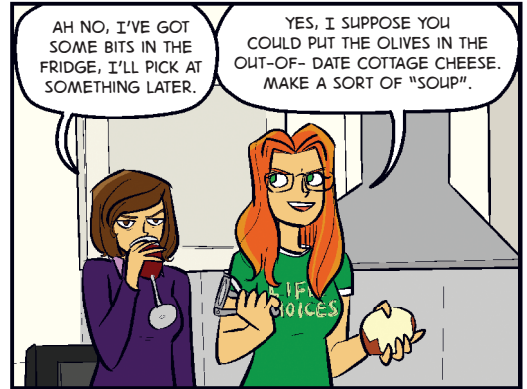
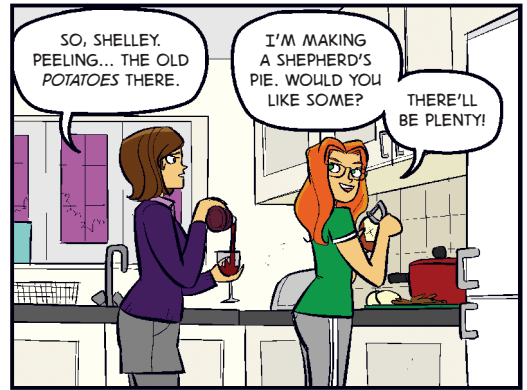
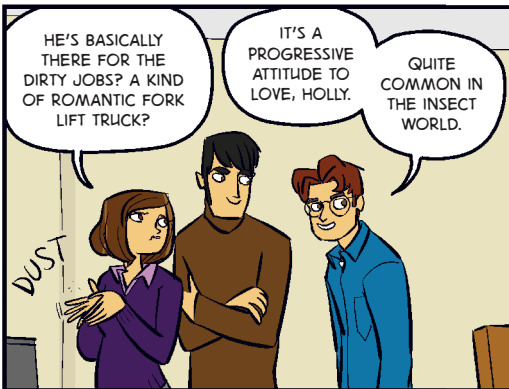
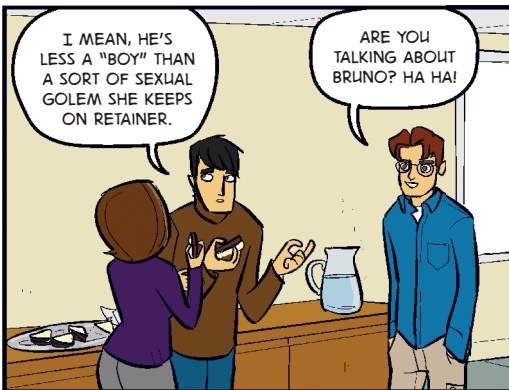
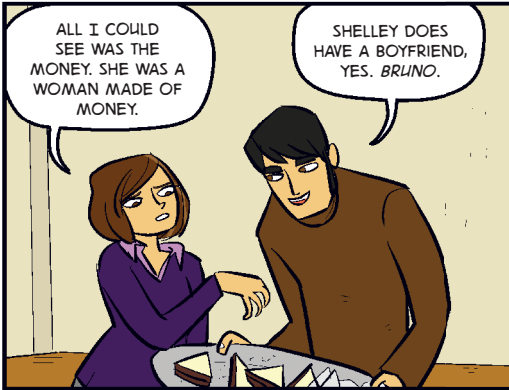
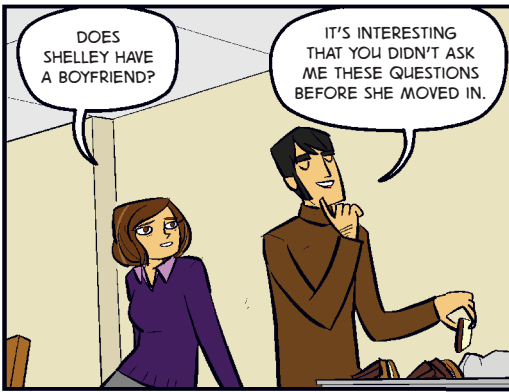
I WANT TO BE ABLE TO SHUT A DOOR BEHIND ME, AT LEAST!



WE CAN PROBABLY PUT SOME TOWELS DOWN IN THE CLIPBOARD UNDER THE STAIRS.

YOU COULD USE YOUR DAD'S CAR WASHING SPONGE AS A PILLOW.





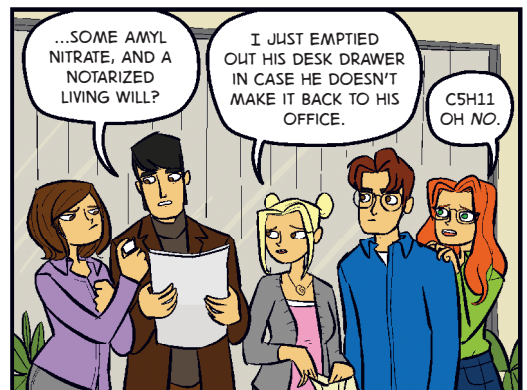
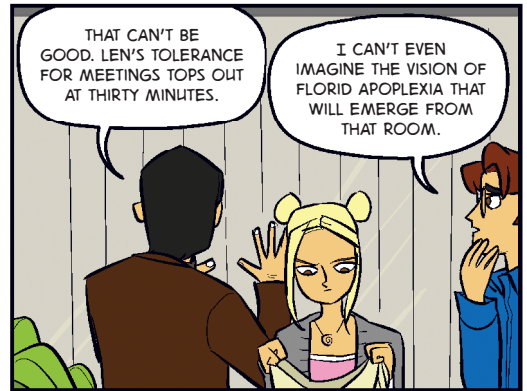
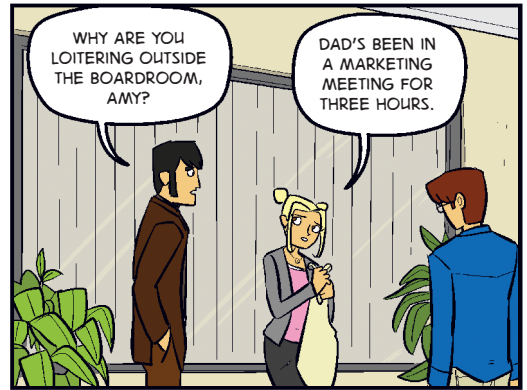
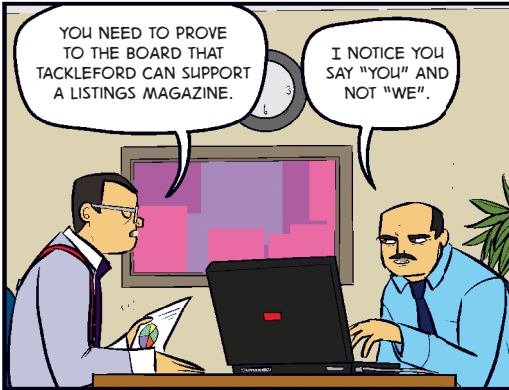
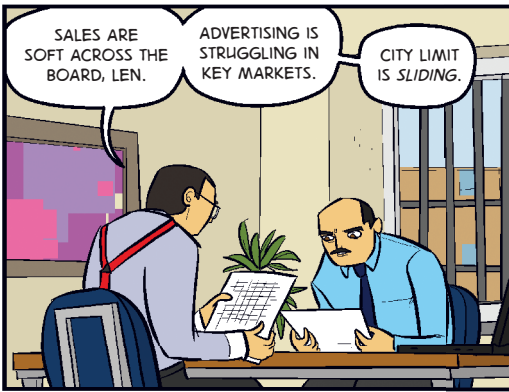
SEX AND THE CITY LIMIT

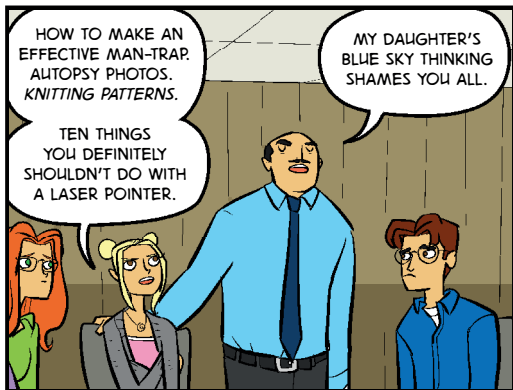
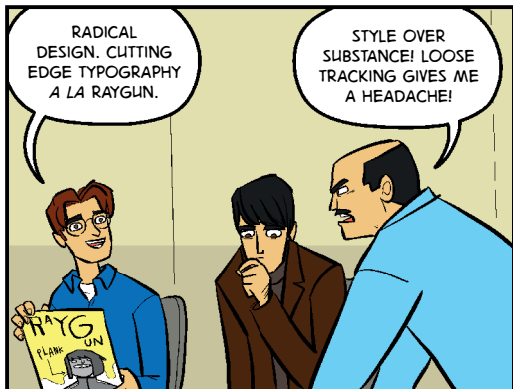
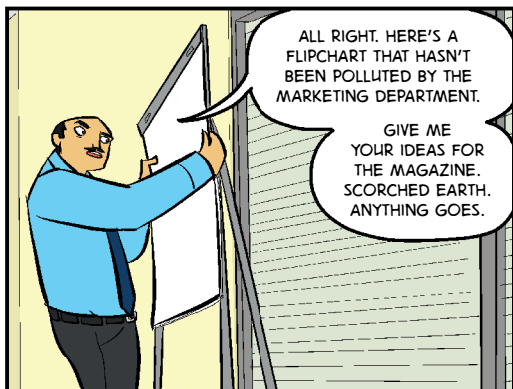
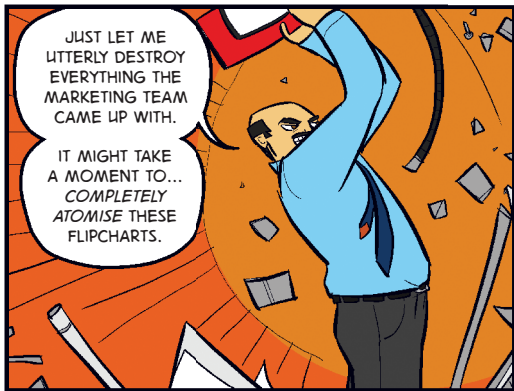
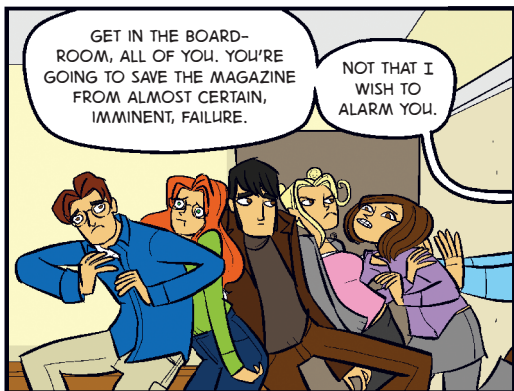
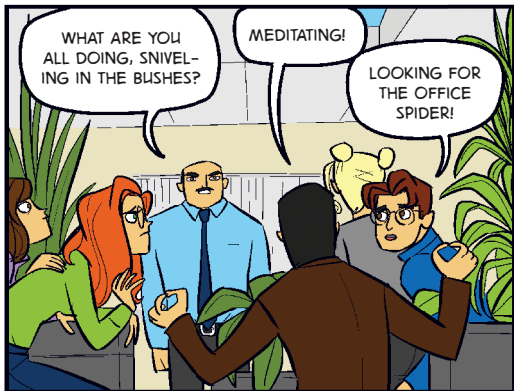
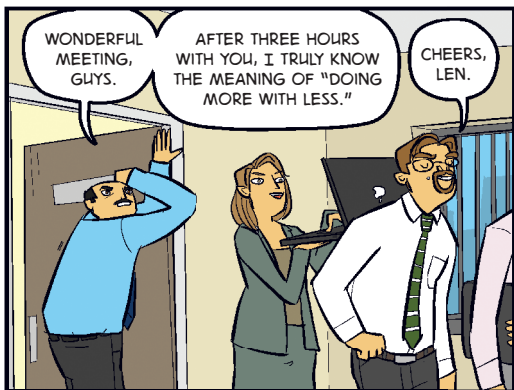
Once I'd got the notion that Bobbins was going to be a syndicated comic out of my head, I embraced webcomics. Webcomics were new, they were hot and they were going places. A true visionary, I revolutionised the industry by colouring mine in, at a time when most were repurposed college strips in basic black and white. I struggled to get characters to look consistent from panel to panel and strip to strip at first, but if you coloured them in, it did half the work for you!

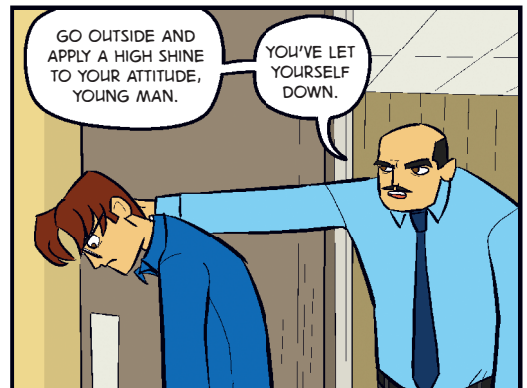
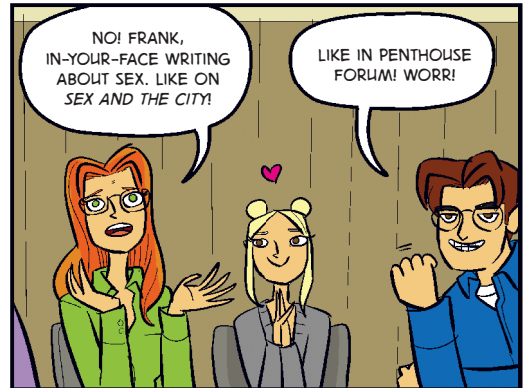
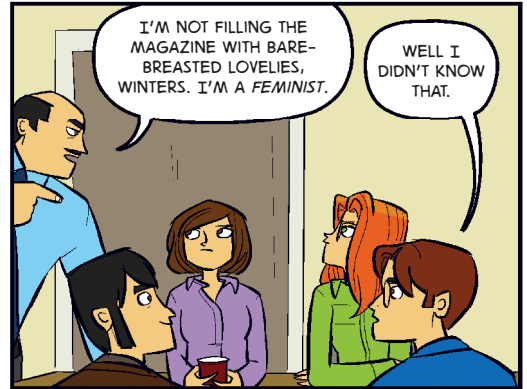
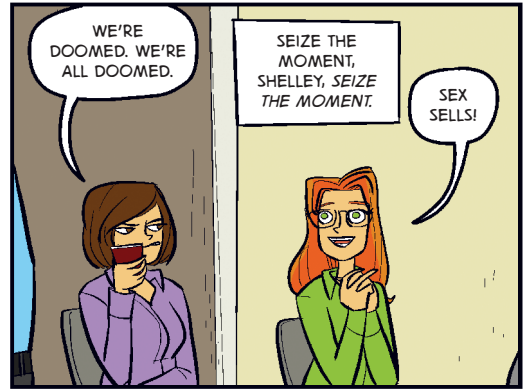
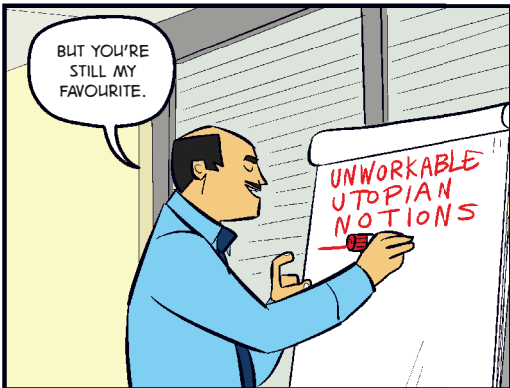
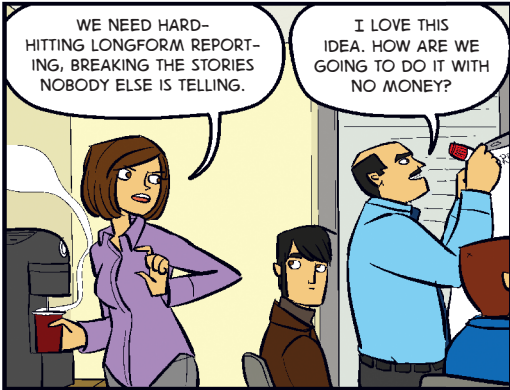
Webcomics were off the leash and in your face. They were up in your grill with *themes*. You could be a little sexy if you wanted. A little blue. No one was going to tell you off. In some of the earlier comics, you can see a deeply repressed Englishman trying to let it all hang out while simultaneously trying to stuff it all back in again at top speed. So this story is both a reference to that period of the comic, and that period of my human mind. Enjoy the result, which while "safe for work", does hint at the notion that someone, somewhere, is having sex right now, and probably enjoying it, although there is absolutely no guarantee of that.

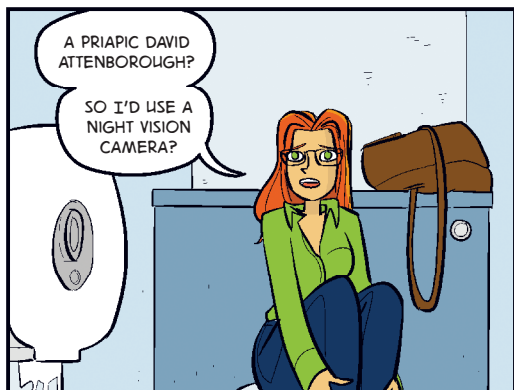
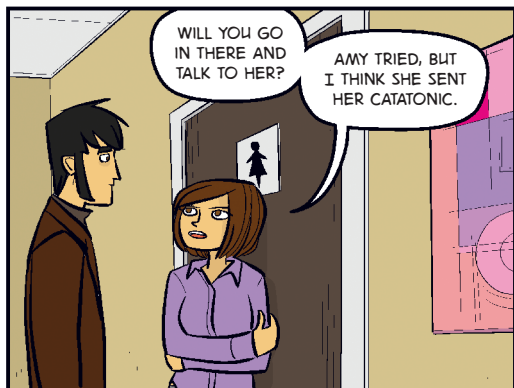
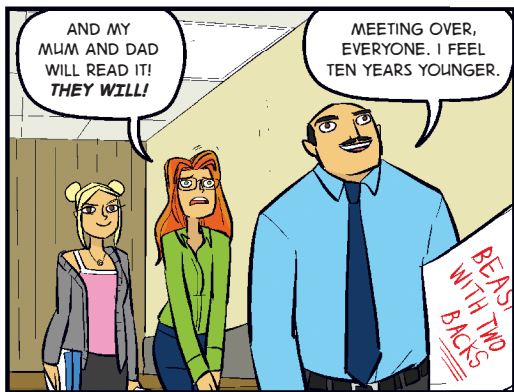
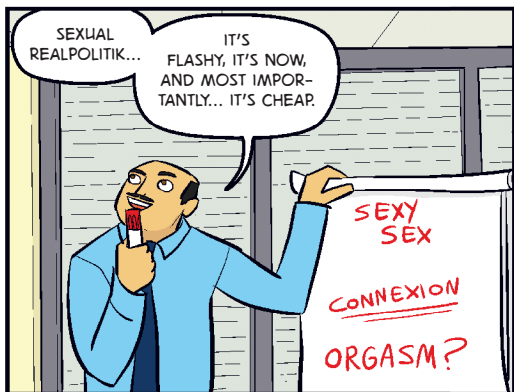
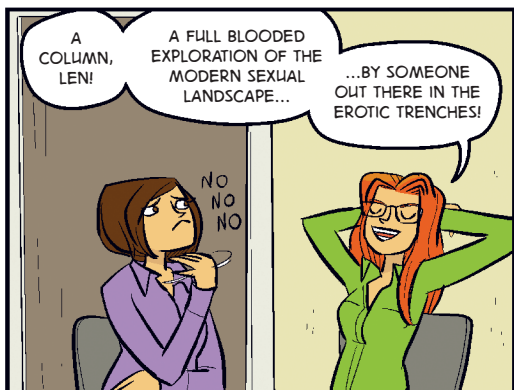
In the early Bobbins, Len Pickering was a slightly sleazy figure, who became more benign as the years went by. He is presented here as he was: a man who keeps a vial of poppers in his desk drawer.

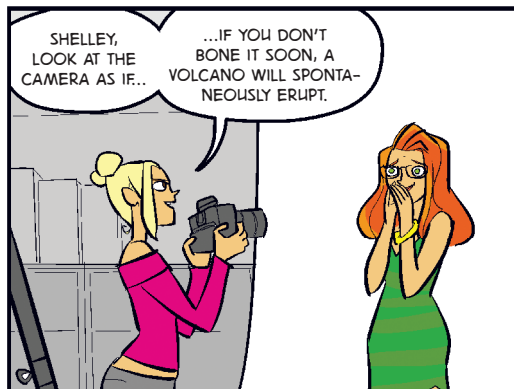
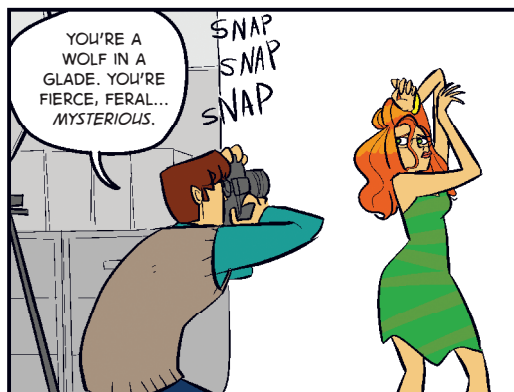
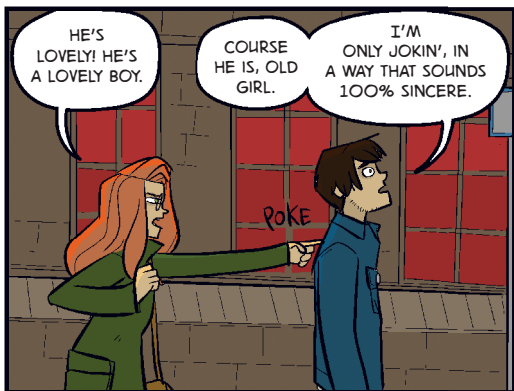
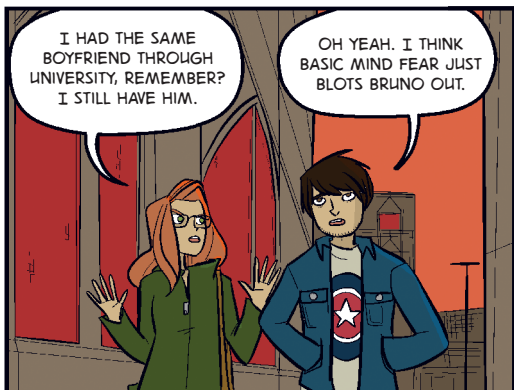
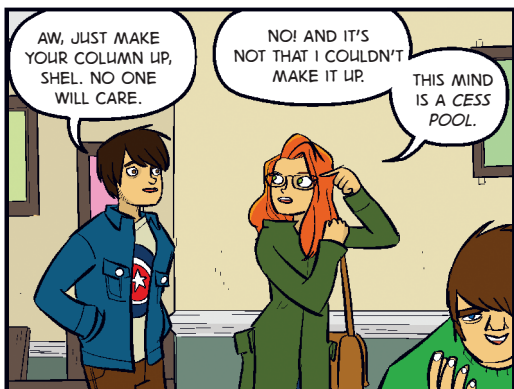


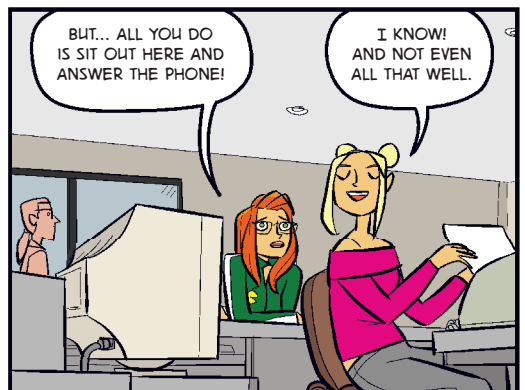
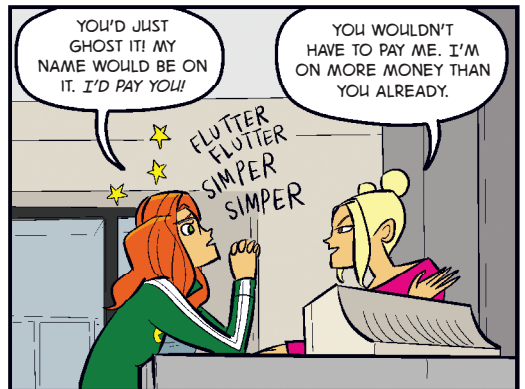
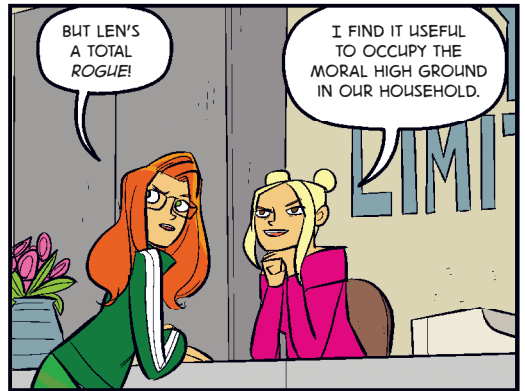
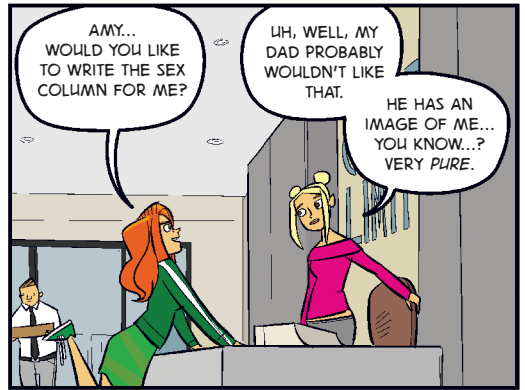
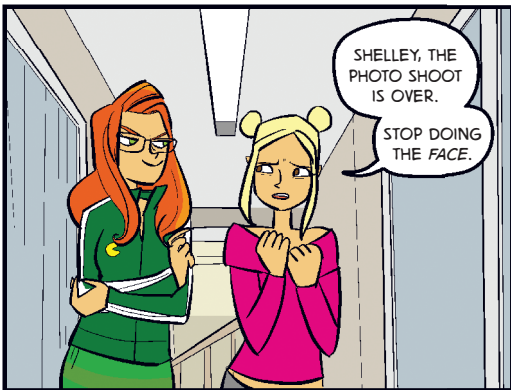
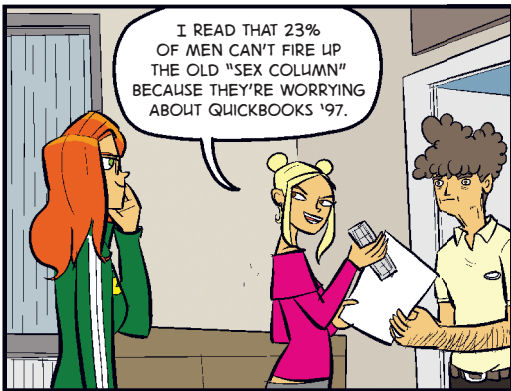
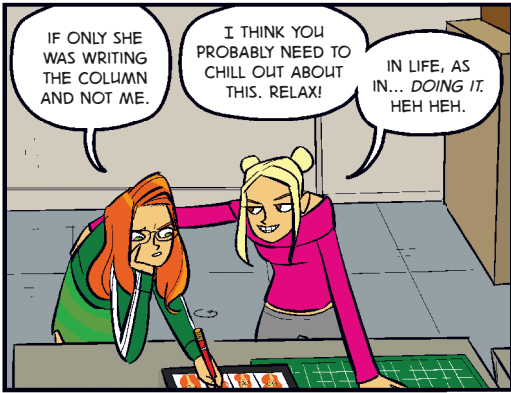
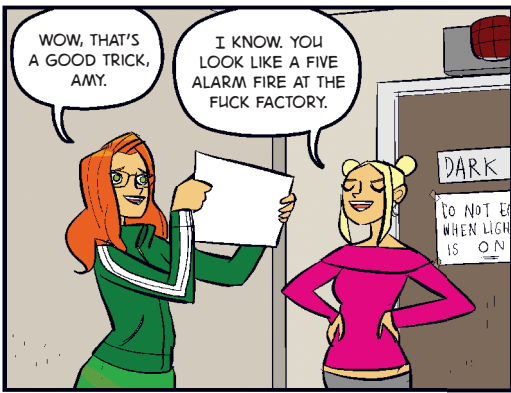


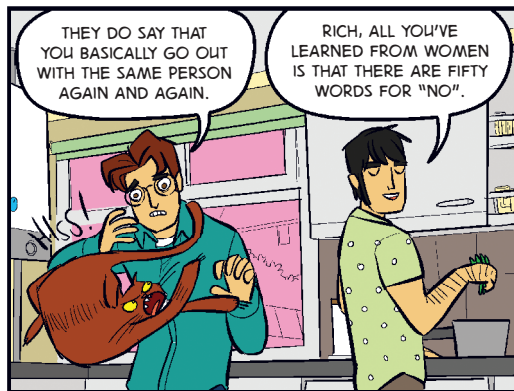
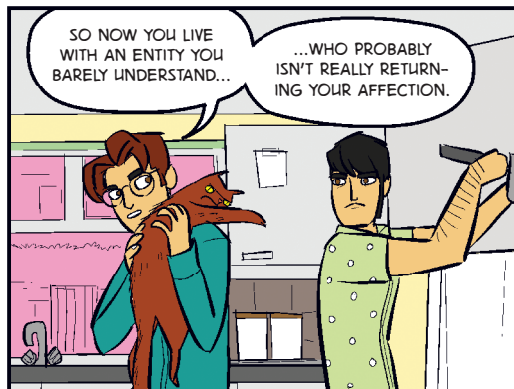
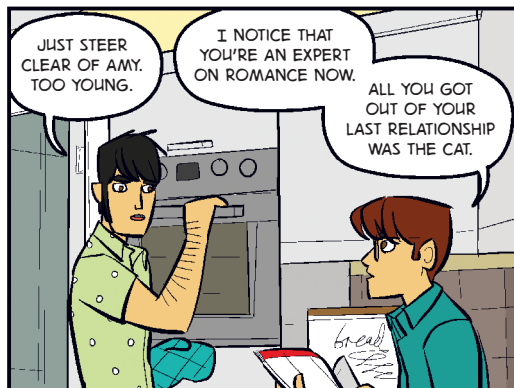
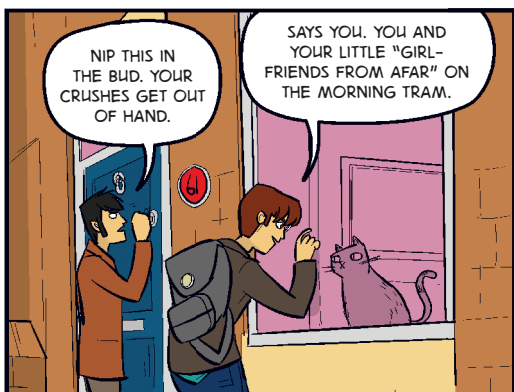
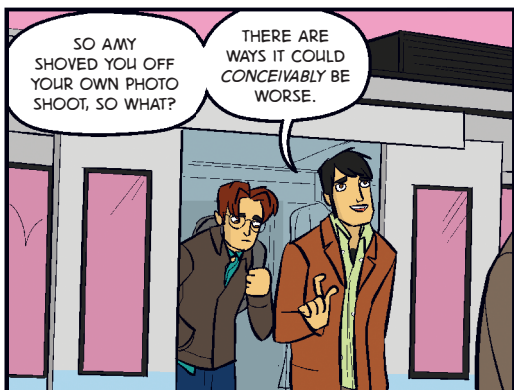


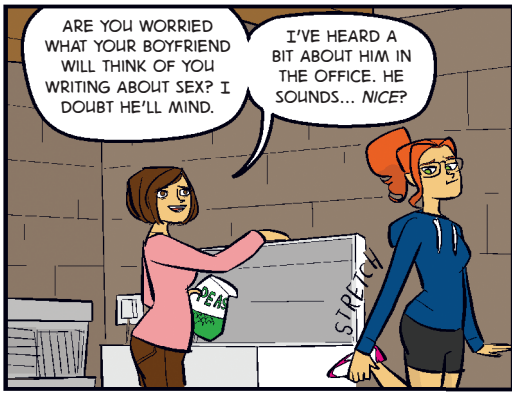






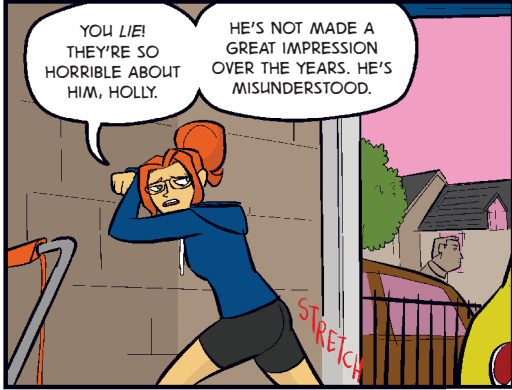






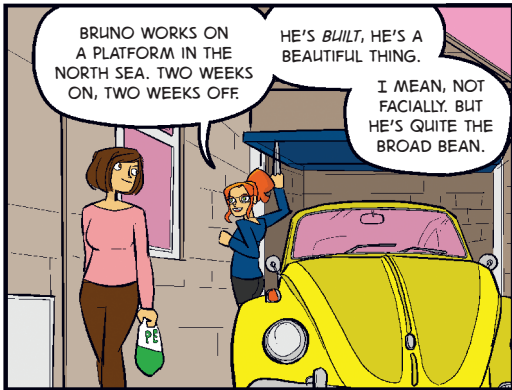
ARE YOU WORRIED WHAT YOUR BOYFRIEND WILL THINK OF YOU WRITING ABOUT SEX? I DOUBT HE'LL MIND.

I'VE HEARD A BIT ABOUT HIM IN THE OFFICE. HE SOUNDS... NICE?



YOU LIE! THEY'RE SO HORRIBLE ABOUT HIM, HOLLY.

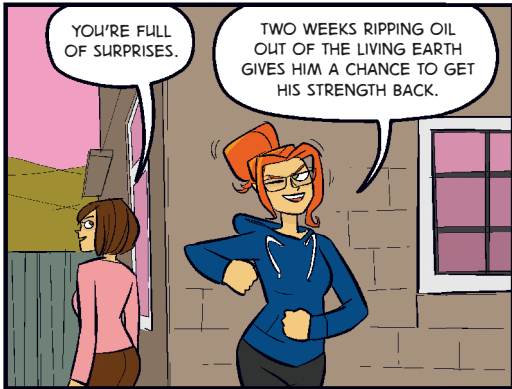
HE'S NOT MADE A GREAT IMPRESSION OVER THE YEARS. HE'S MISUNDERSTOOD.



BRUNO WORKS ON A PLATFORM IN THE NORTH SEA. TWO WEEKS ON, TWO WEEKS OFF.

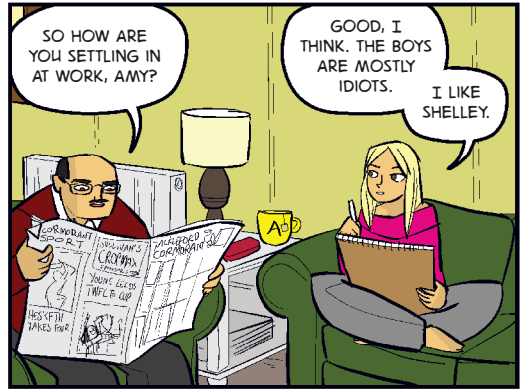
HE'S BUILT, HE'S A BEAUTIFUL THING.

I MEAN, NOT FACIALLY. BUT HE'S QUITE THE BROAD BEAN.



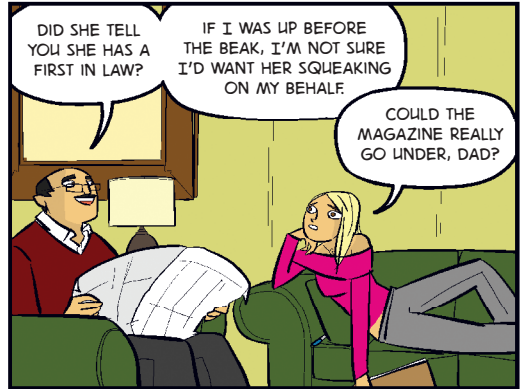
YOU'RE FULL OF SURPRISES.

TWO WEEKS RIPPING OIL OUT OF THE LIVING EARTH GIVES HIM A CHANCE TO GET HIS STRENGTH BACK.



SO HOW ARE YOU SETTLING IN AT WORK, AMY?

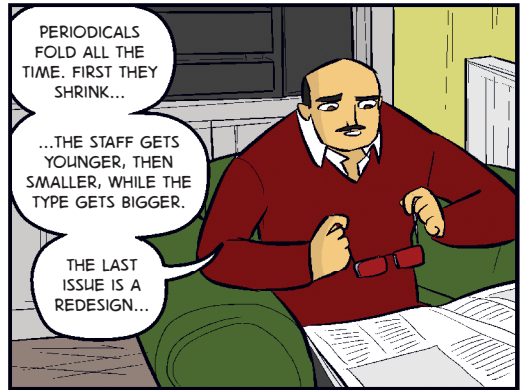
GOOD, I THINK. THE BOYS ARE MOSTLY IDIOTS. I LIKE SHELLEY.



DID SHE TELL YOU SHE HAS A FIRST IN LAW?

IF I WAS UP BEFORE THE BEAK, I'M NOT SURE I'D WANT HER SQUEAKING ON MY BEHALF.

COULD THE MAGAZINE REALLY GO UNDER, DAD?



PERIODICALS FOLD ALL THE TIME. FIRST THEY SHRINK...

...THE STAFF GETS YOUNGER, THEN SMALLER, WHILE THE TYPE GETS BIGGER.

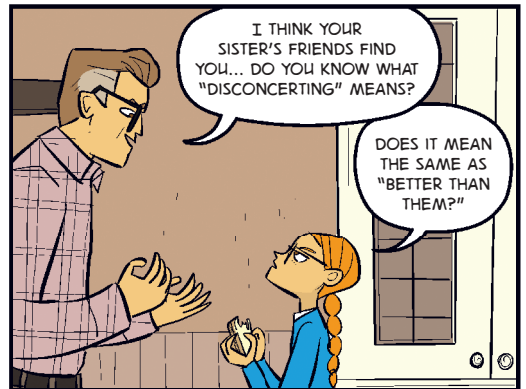
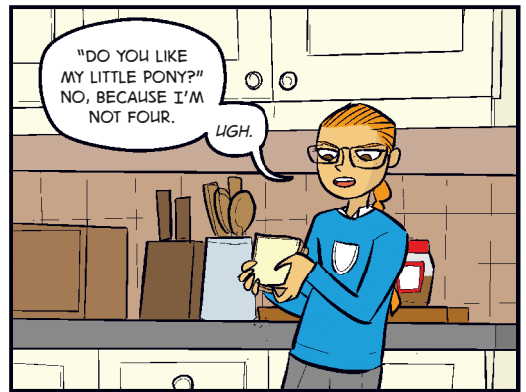
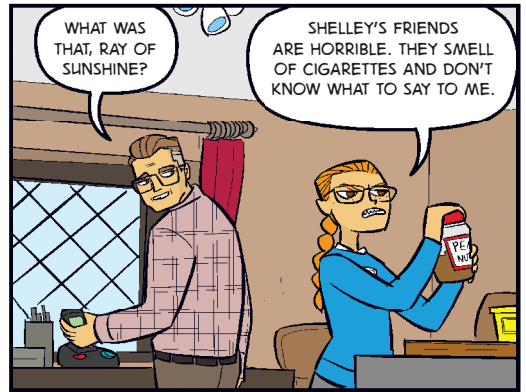
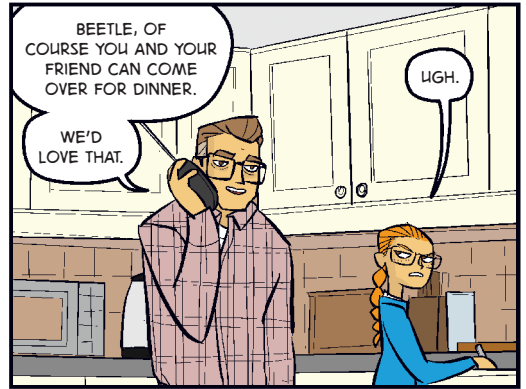
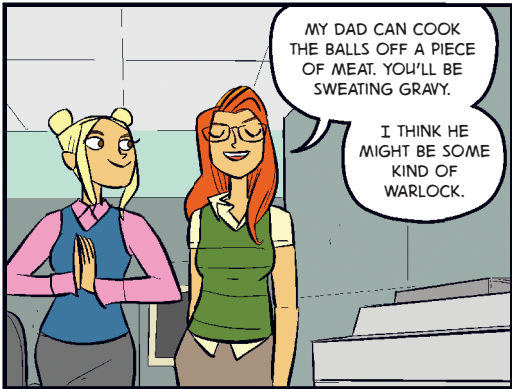
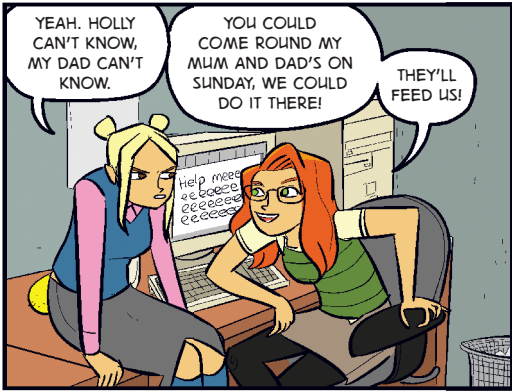
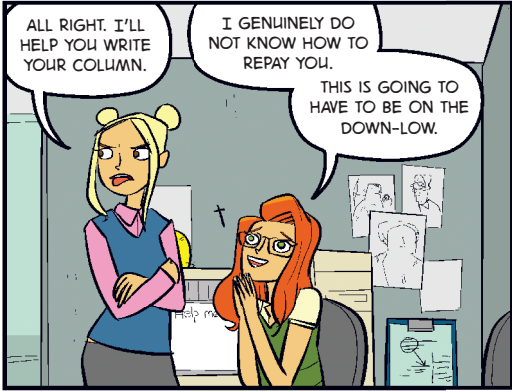
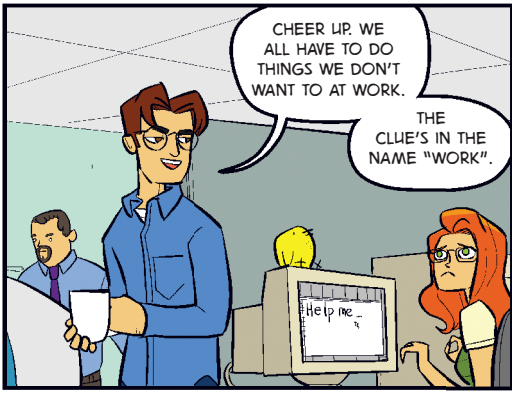
THE LAST ISSUE IS A REDESIGN...

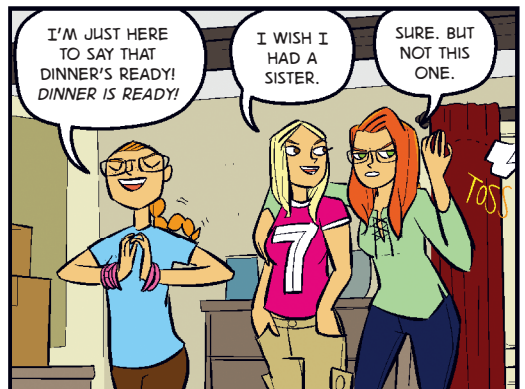
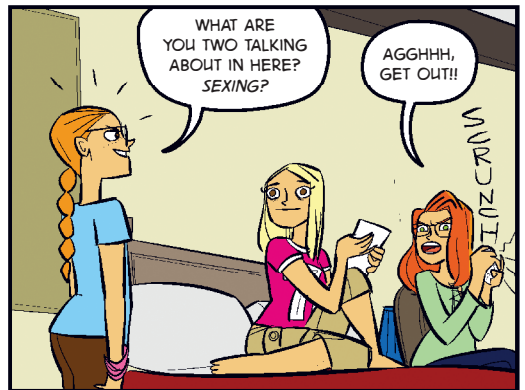
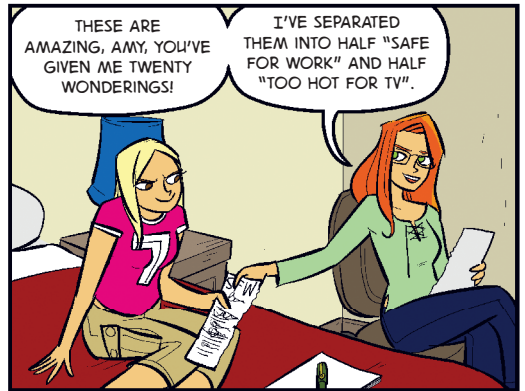
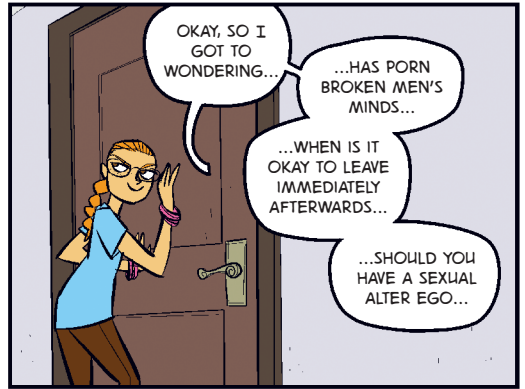
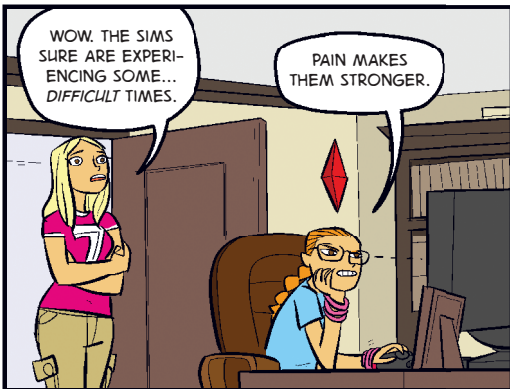
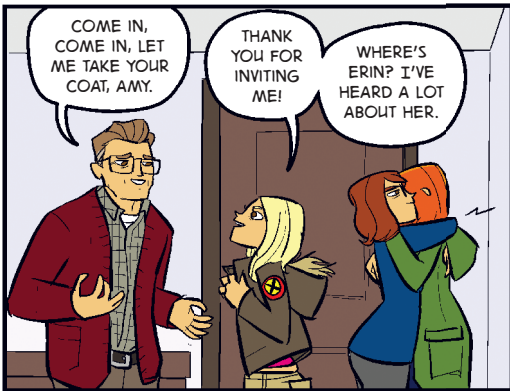
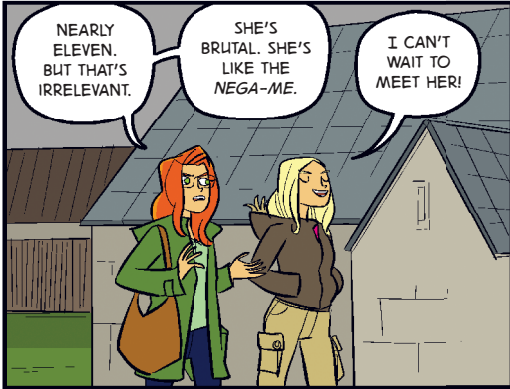
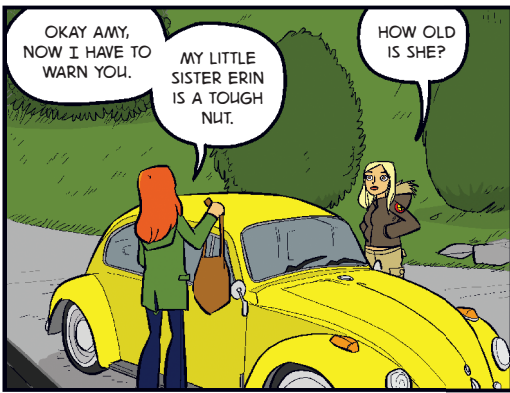


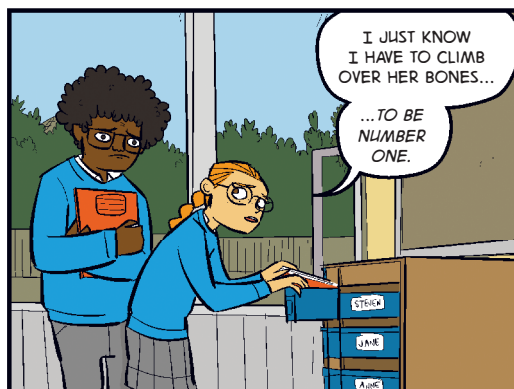
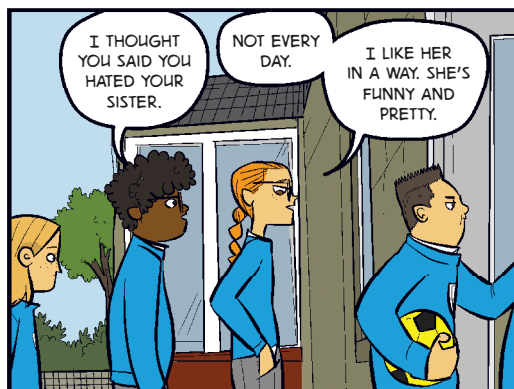
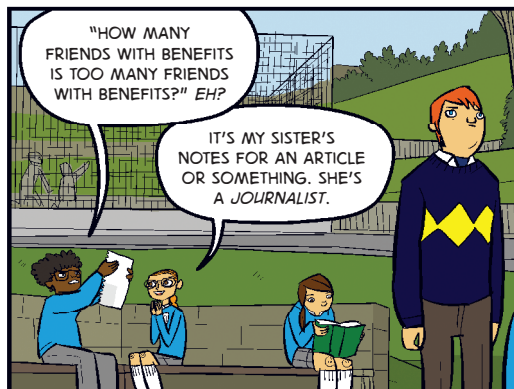
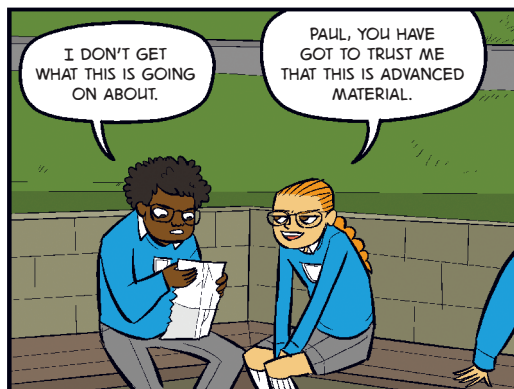
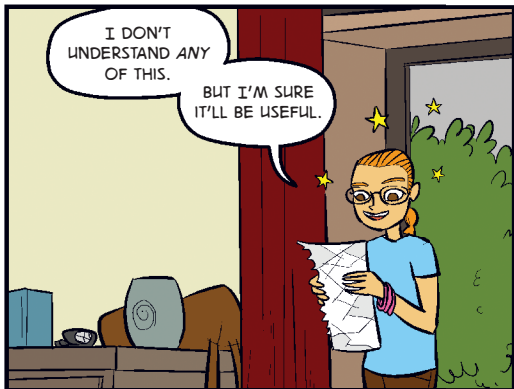
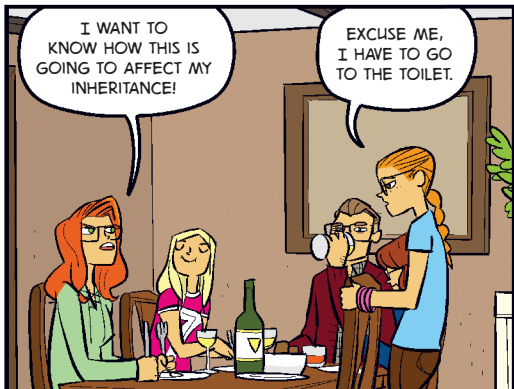
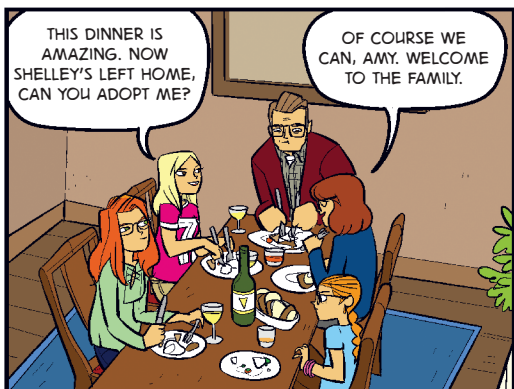
DOOMED EDITORS USUALLY LEAVE A GREAT-LOOKING SUICIDE NOTE.

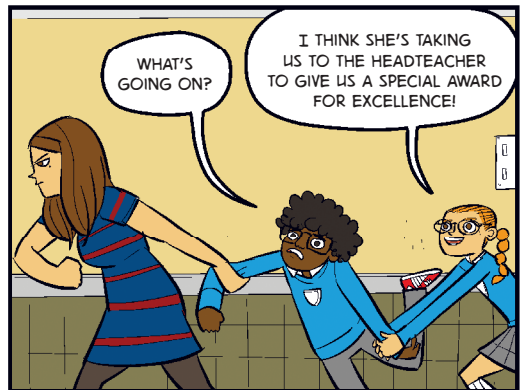
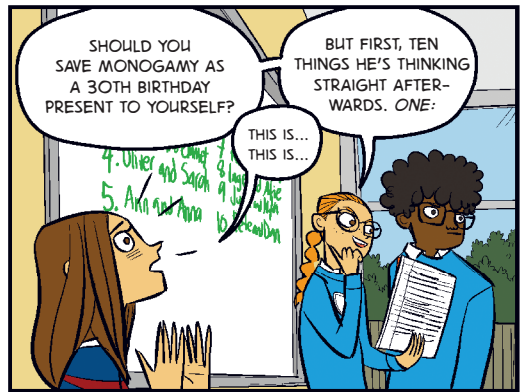
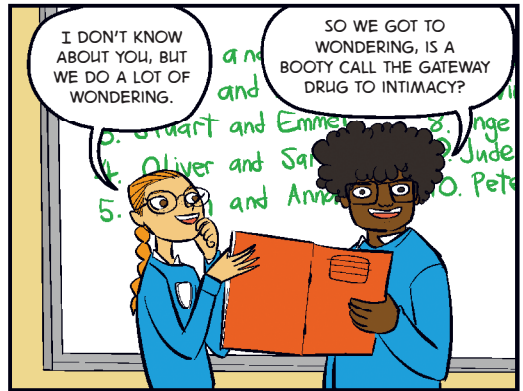
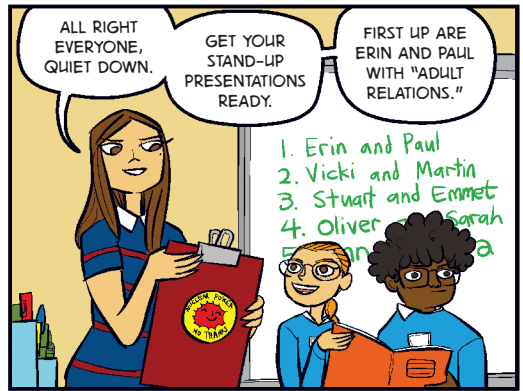
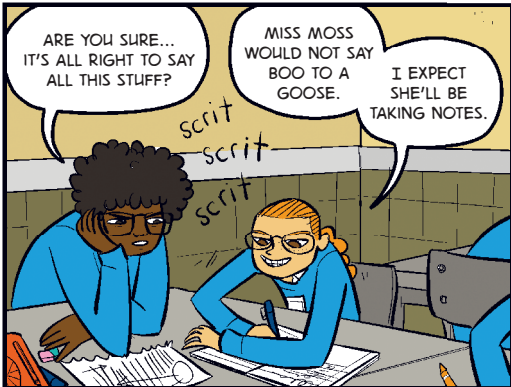
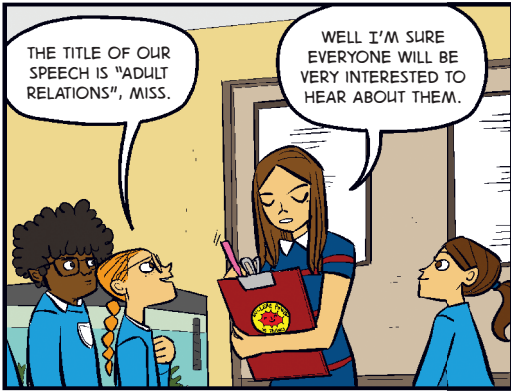
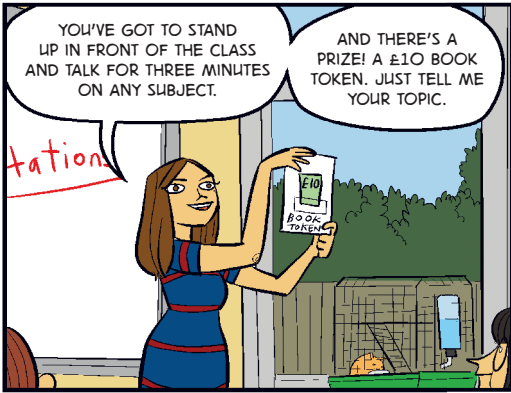
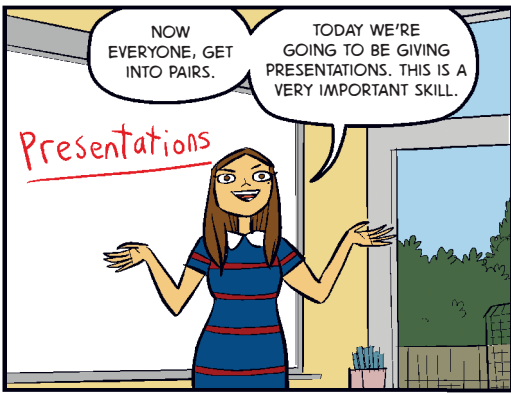
BEFORE RE-EMERGING AT A HAULAGE TRADE PAPER.

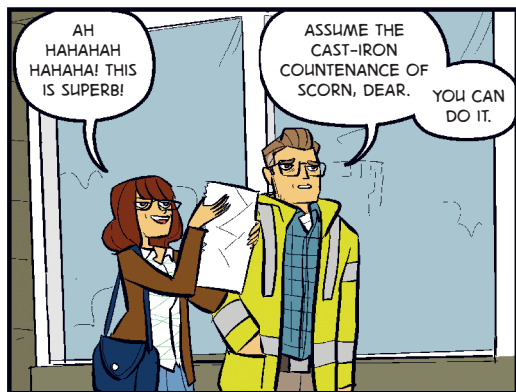
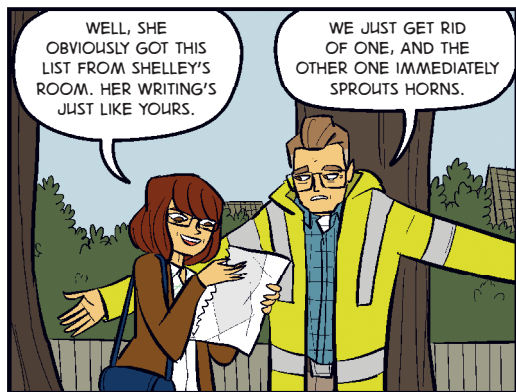
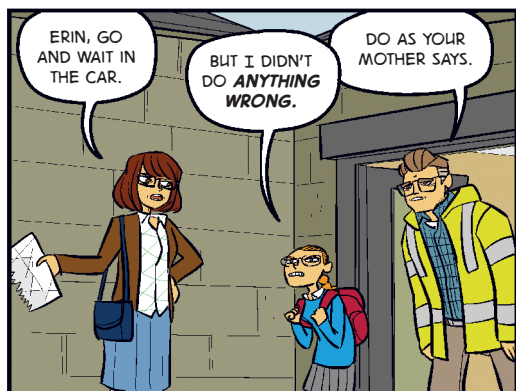
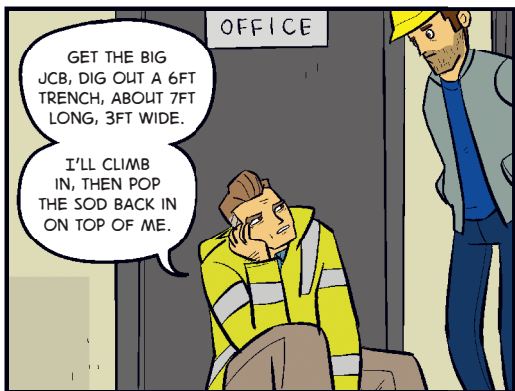
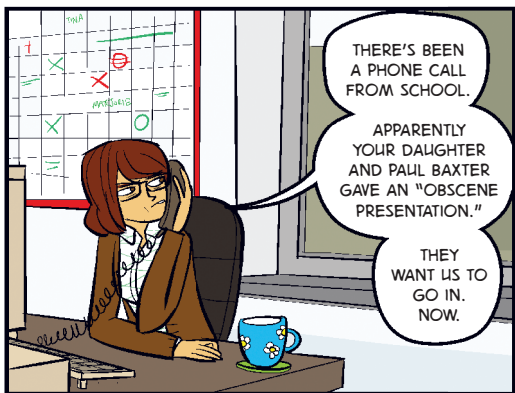
WOW. THE CIRCLE OF LIFE.

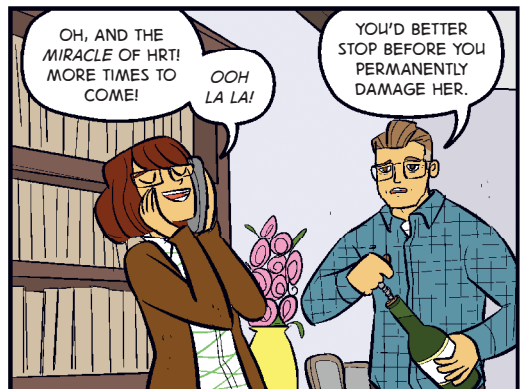
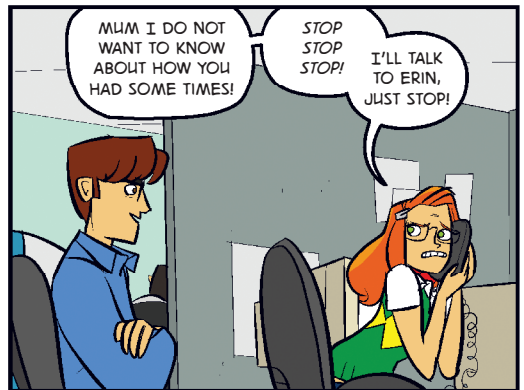
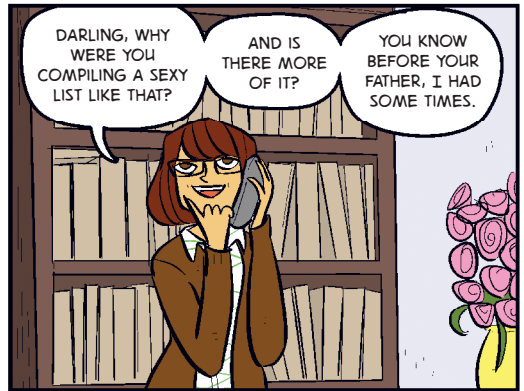
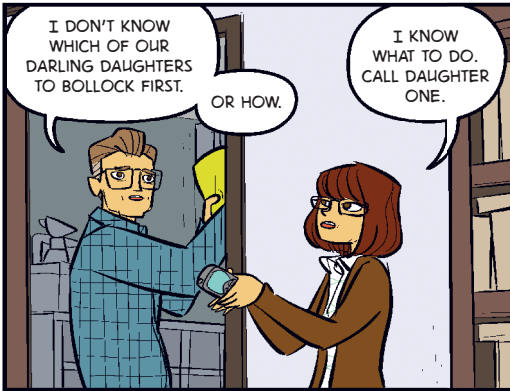
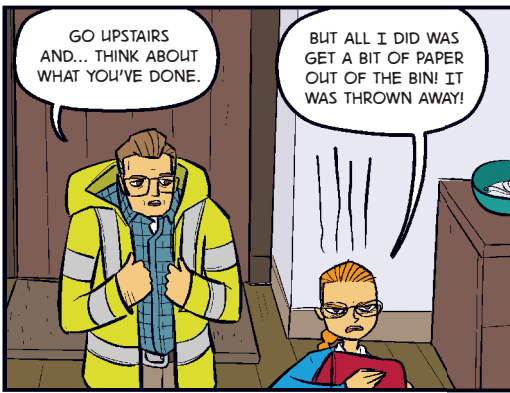


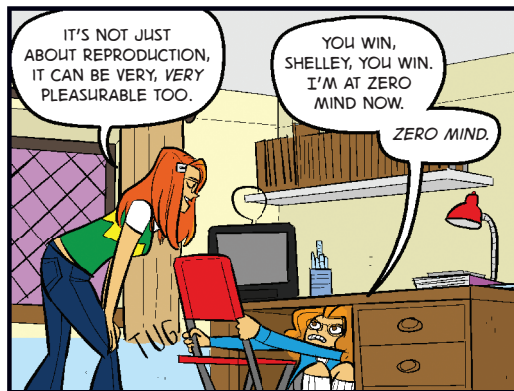
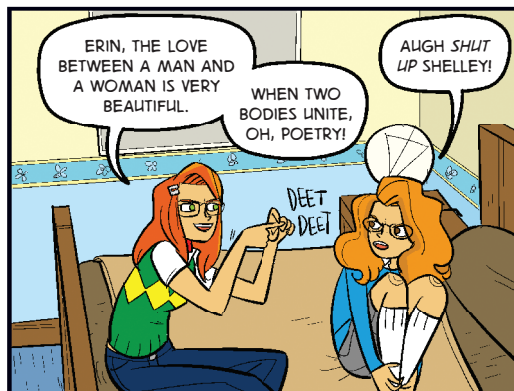
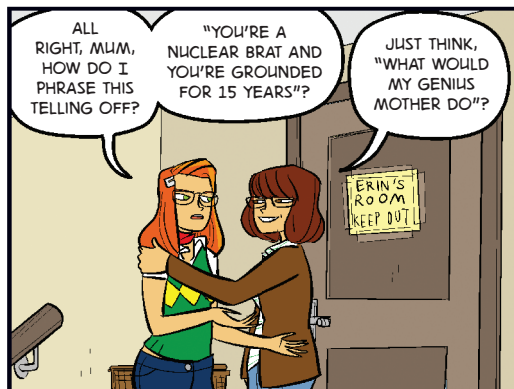
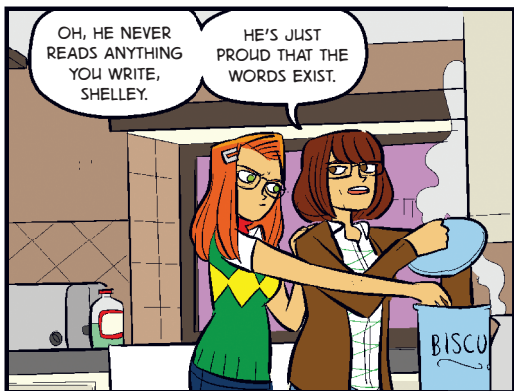
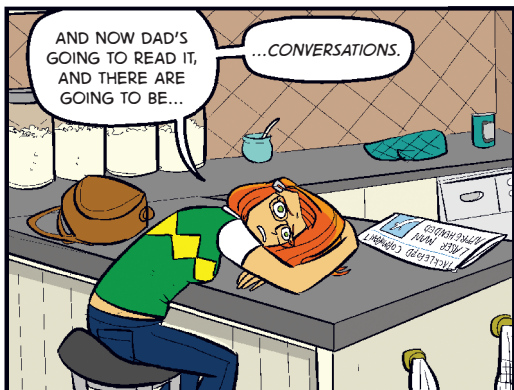
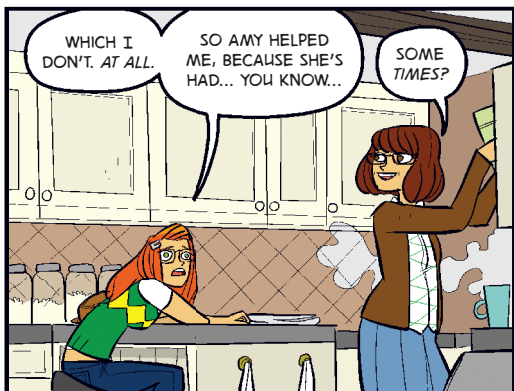
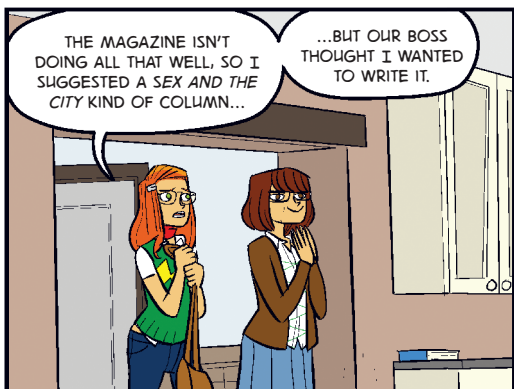


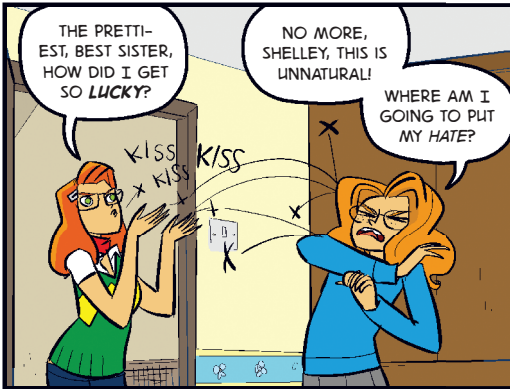
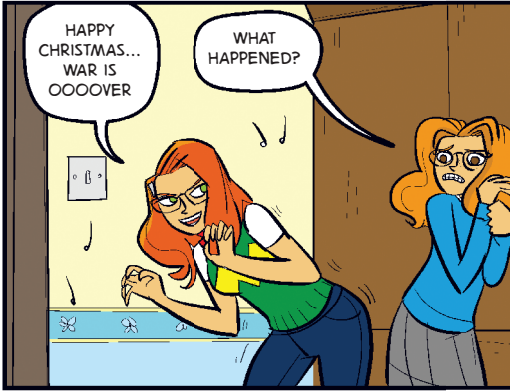
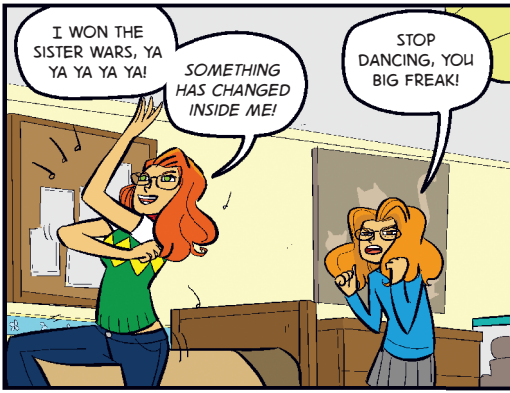












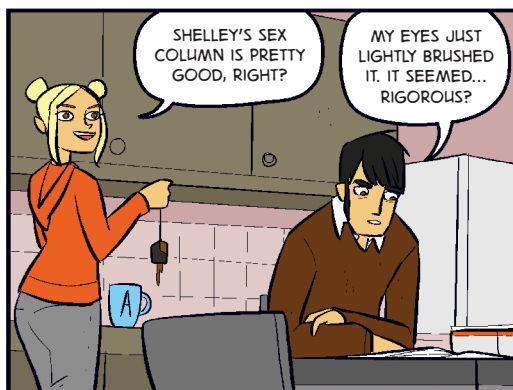
BRUNO

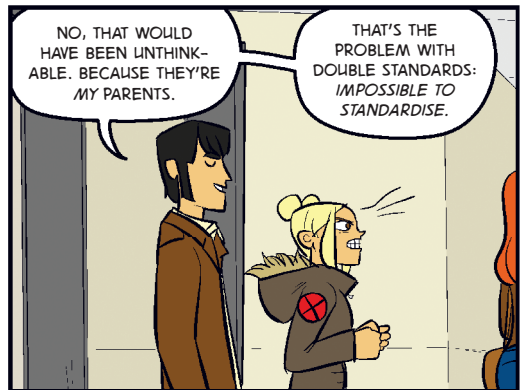
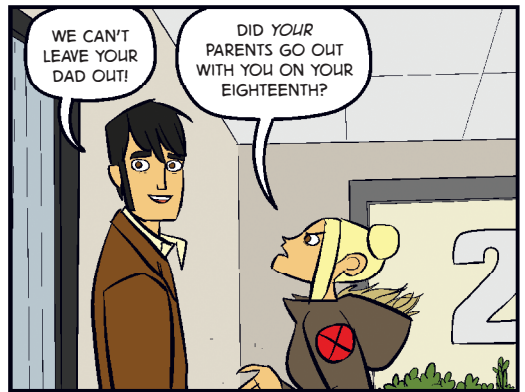
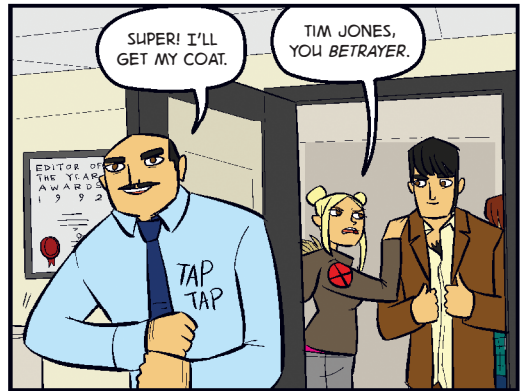
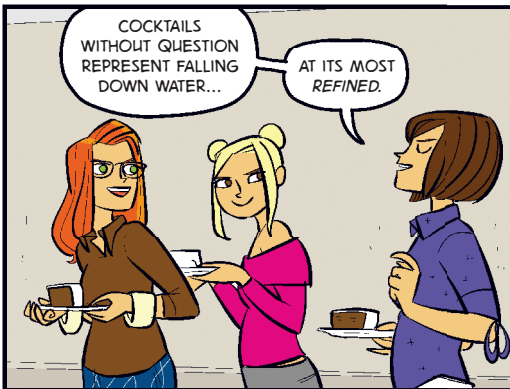
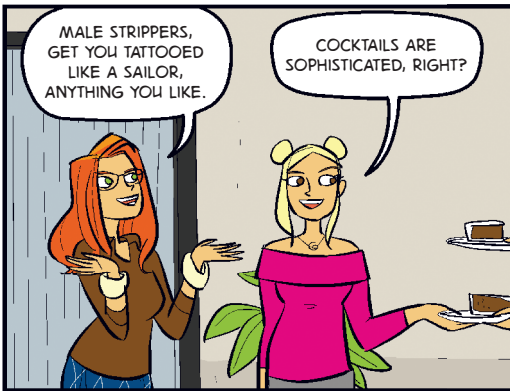
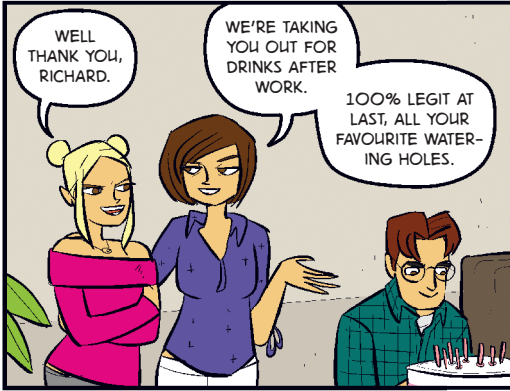
On retracing the old Bobbins comics, Bruno was the hardest part of the story to work out. He was Shelley's boyfriend, he appeared in a week of comics, he was an ugly parody of the sort of terrible man that goes out with that girl you like, because that girl you like likes tough fellows, not twentysomething milquetoasts obsessed with indie music who can't drive.

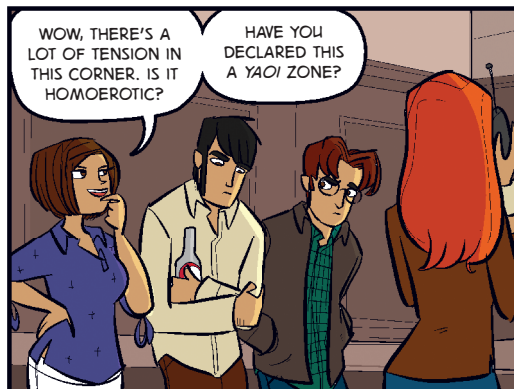
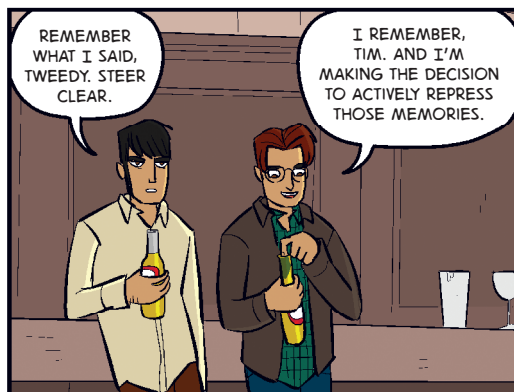
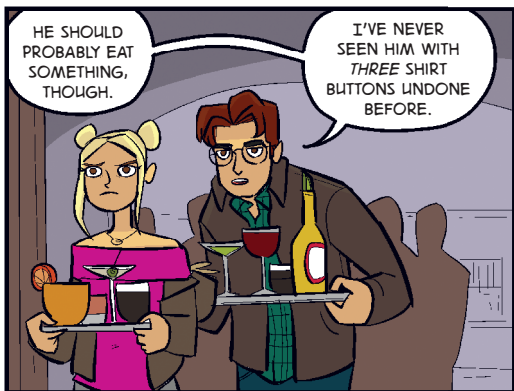
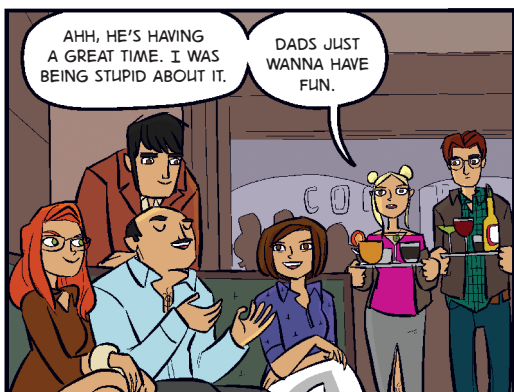
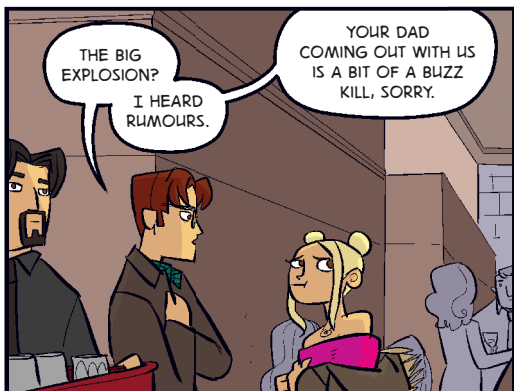
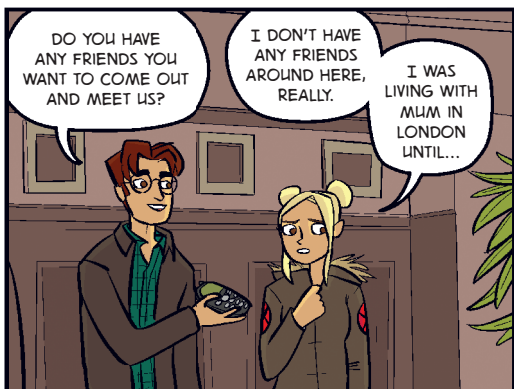
Bruno appeared for his starring week, then disappeared, and apart from a brief mention that he and Shelley had broken up (of course they had!), that was that. None of this had ever made sense in the context of the character, and I'd ignored it because it didn't really matter any more. Now, suddenly, it did. Bruno was a tree across the road that had to be moved.

The answer was easy, really. Bruno wasn't the parody, he was the real thing. Not a monster, but an unreconstructed blue-collar man who loves Shelley and she loves him back. Their relationship has survived her time at university, but while in many ways she's outgrown him, she's not given up on something with deep roots. Once I understood that, Bruno made sense. Of course he doesn't get on with her friends. Of course he doesn't fit. At that point I felt sorry for him, and the real work could begin.

Poor old Bruno.





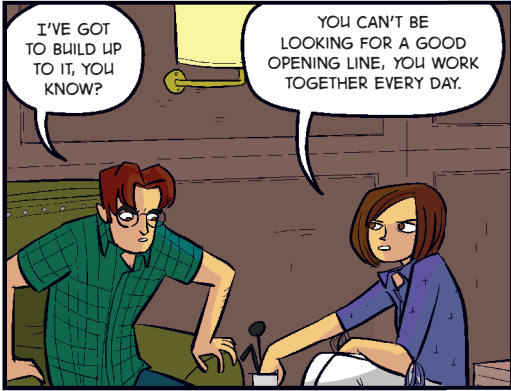




AMY'S THE CUTEST THING I'VE EVER SEEN. ARGH.

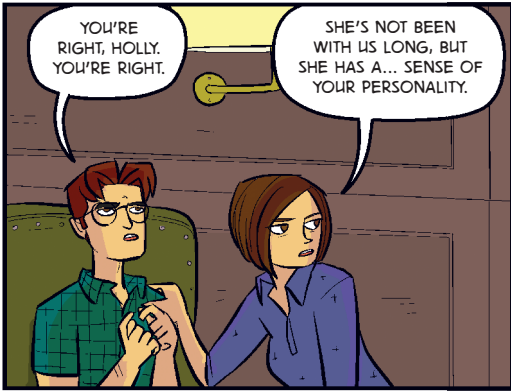
JUST ASK HER OUT THEN. GET IT OVER WITH.

CHIK



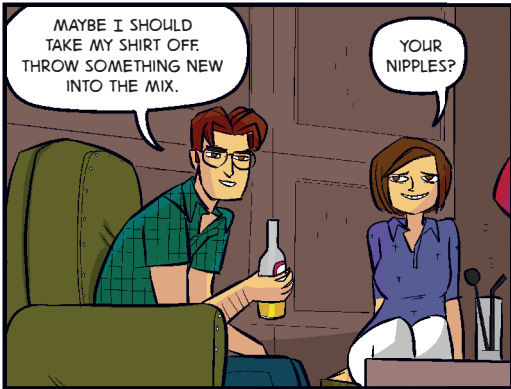
I'VE GOT TO BUILD UP TO IT, YOU KNOW?

YOU CAN'T BE LOOKING FOR A GOOD OPENING LINE, YOU WORK TOGETHER EVERY DAY.



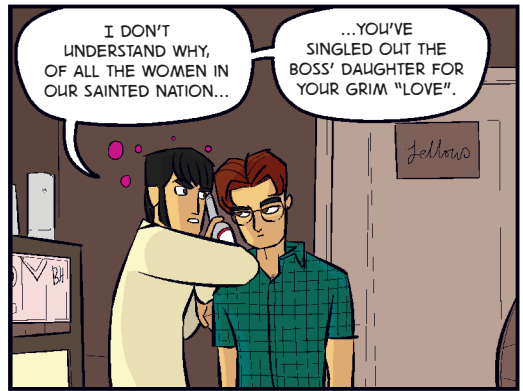
YOU'RE RIGHT, HOLLY. YOU'RE RIGHT.

SHE'S NOT BEEN WITH US LONG, BUT SHE HAS A... SENSE OF YOUR PERSONALITY.



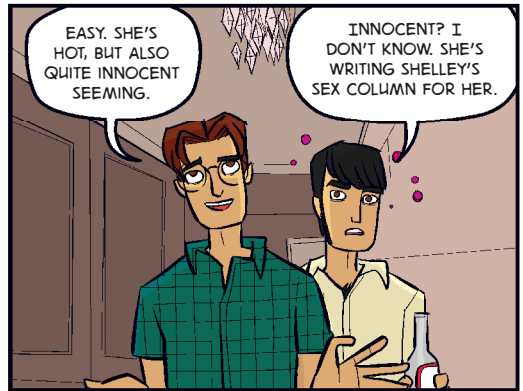
MAYBE I SHOULD TAKE MY SHIRT OFF. THROW SOMETHING NEW INTO THE MIX.

YOUR NIPPLES?



I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY, OF ALL THE WOMEN IN OUR SAINTED NATION...

...YOU'VE SINGLED OUT THE BOSS' DAUGHTER FOR YOUR GRIM "LOVE".



EASY. SHE'S HOT, BUT ALSO QUITE INNOCENT SEEMING.

INNOCENT? I DON'T KNOW. SHE'S WRITING SHELLEY'S SEX COLUMN FOR HER.



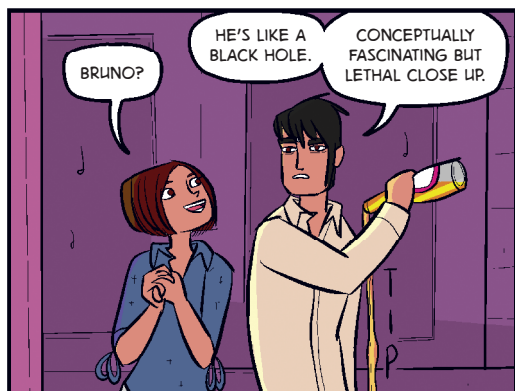
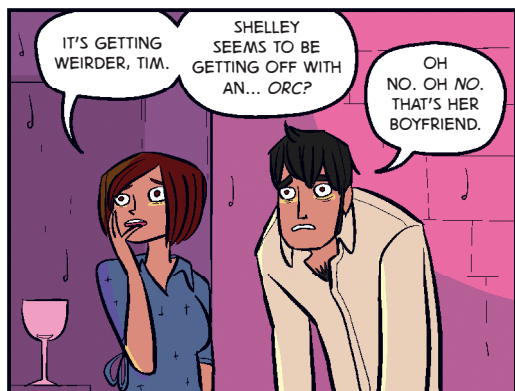
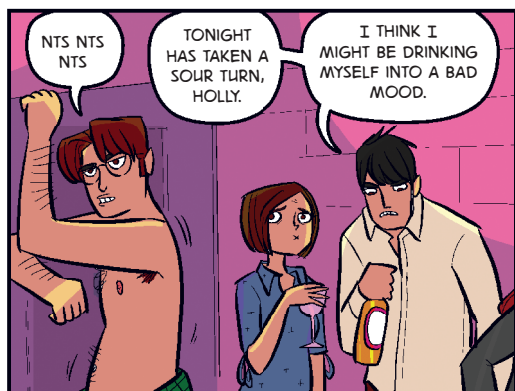
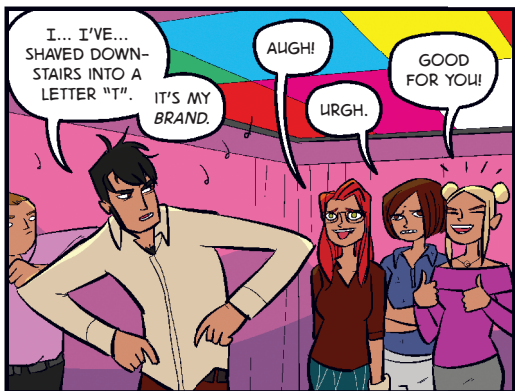
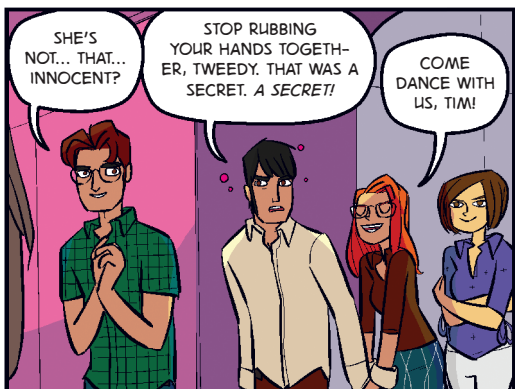
IS SHE?

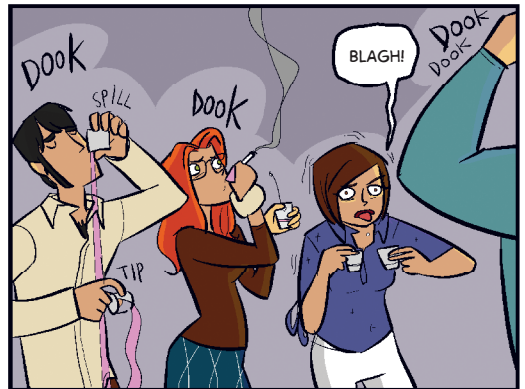
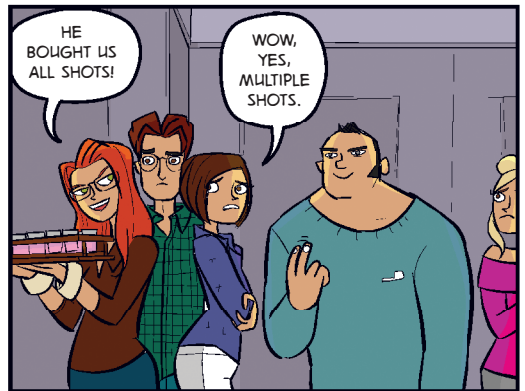
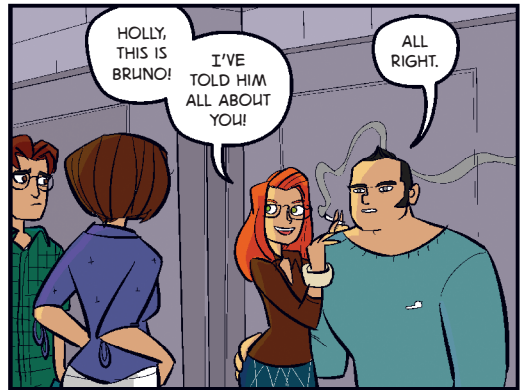
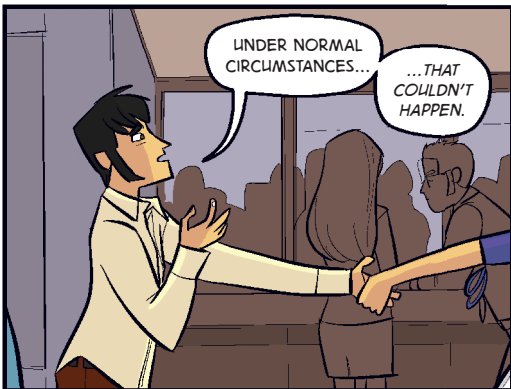
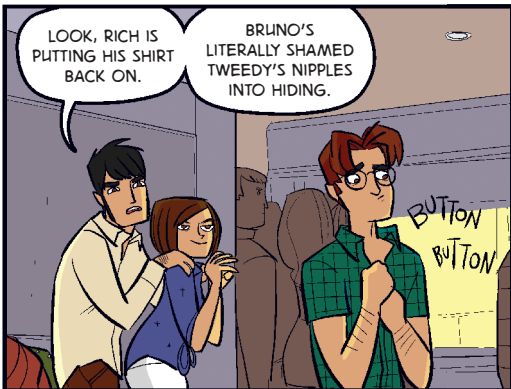
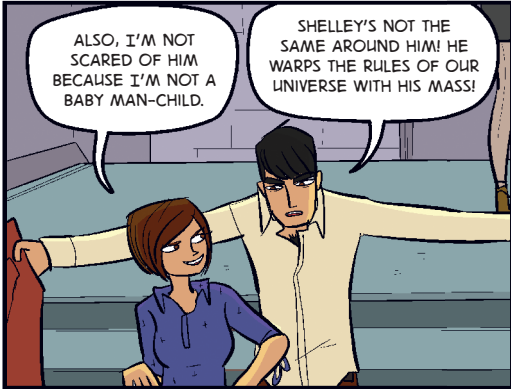
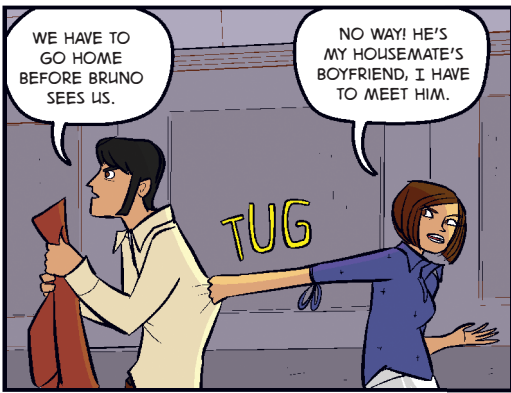
WAIT, THAT WAS A SECRET.

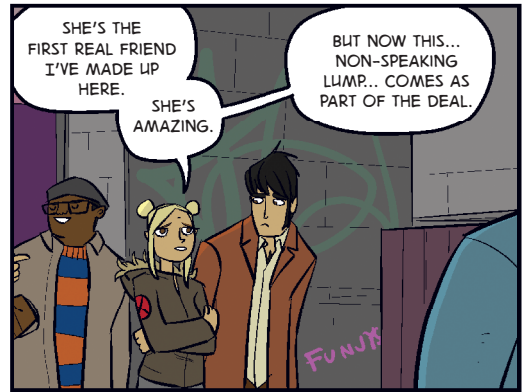
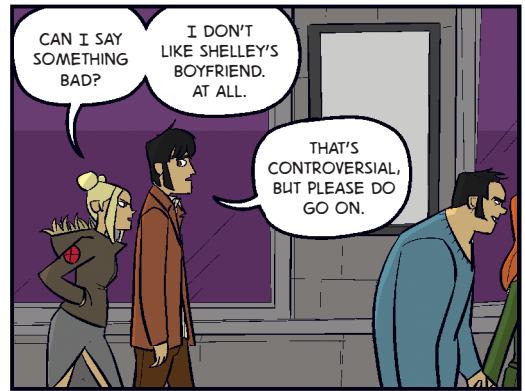
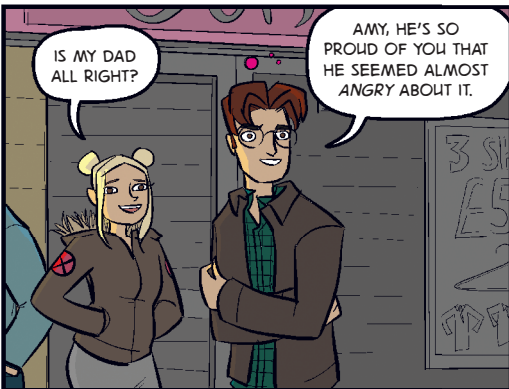
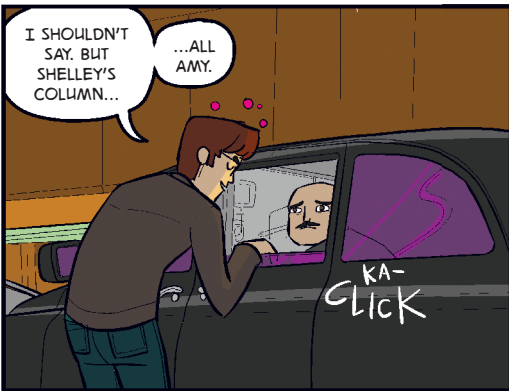
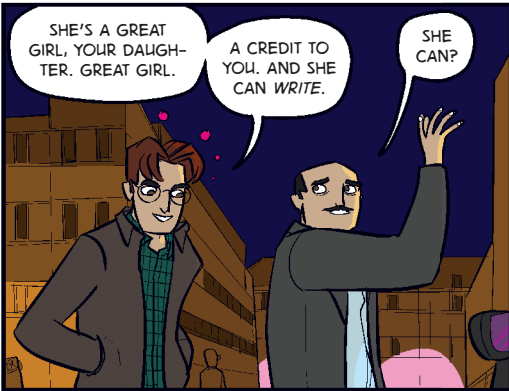
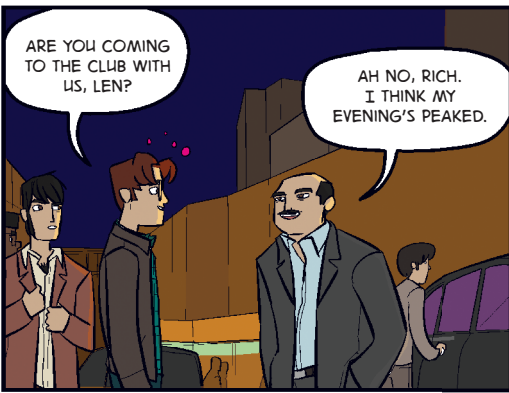


YOU'RE ON YOUR FIFTH BOTTLE OF TRUTH JUICE, JONESY.

"OMERTA" HAS BECOME A RELATIVE TERM.









18 YEARS. 18 YEARS IS ALL IT TOOK.



ALL IT TOOK FOR WHAT?

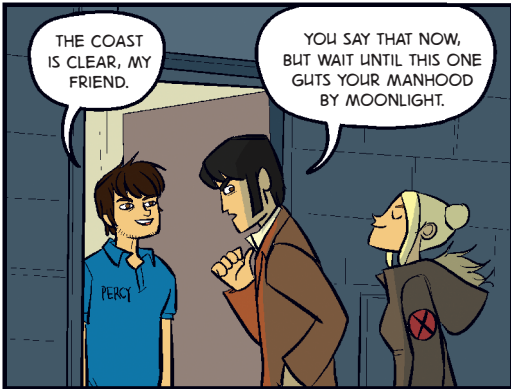
ALL IT TOOK FOR ME TO BE MURDERED IN AN ALLEY.

TAP TAP



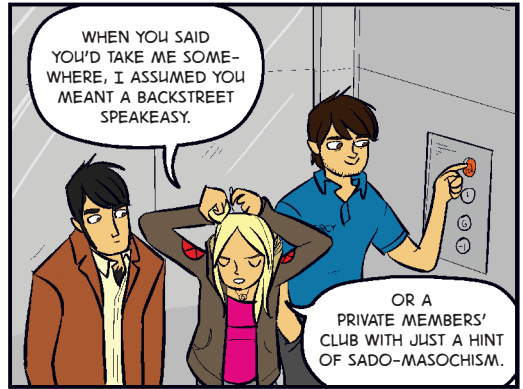
MURDERED IN AN ALLEY BY THE MAN WHO GIVES POP RECORDS MARKS OUT OF FIVE IN A REGIONAL MAGAZINE.

MURDER ISN'T FUNNY. ALSO, ARE YOU MOCKING MY CALLING?



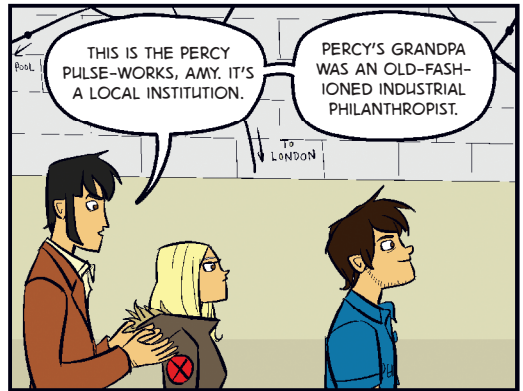
THE COAST IS CLEAR, MY FRIEND.

YOU SAY THAT NOW, BUT WAIT UNTIL THIS ONE GUTS YOUR MANHOOD BY MOONLIGHT.



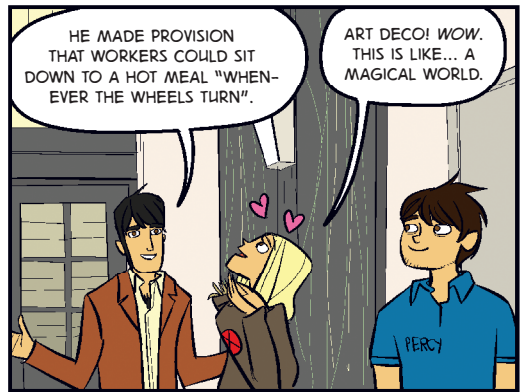
WHEN YOU SAID YOU'D TAKE ME SOMEWHERE, I ASSUMED YOU MEANT A BACKSTREET SPEAKEASY.

OR A PRIVATE MEMBERS' CLUB WITH JUST A HINT OF SADO-MASOCHISM.



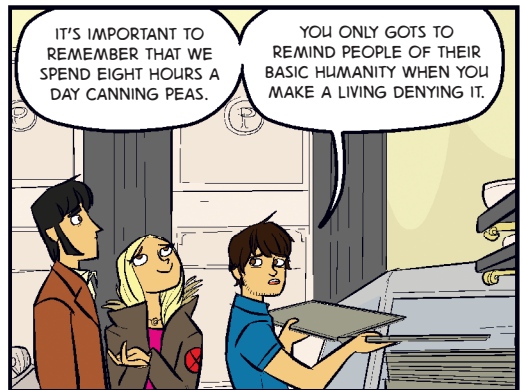
THIS IS THE PERCY PULSE-WORKS, AMY. IT'S A LOCAL INSTITUTION.

PERCY'S GRANDPA WAS AN OLD-FASHIONED INDUSTRIAL PHILANTHROPIST.



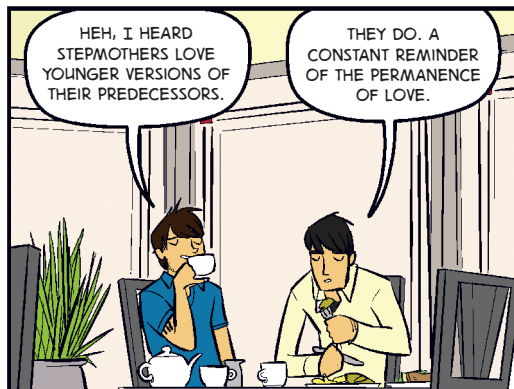
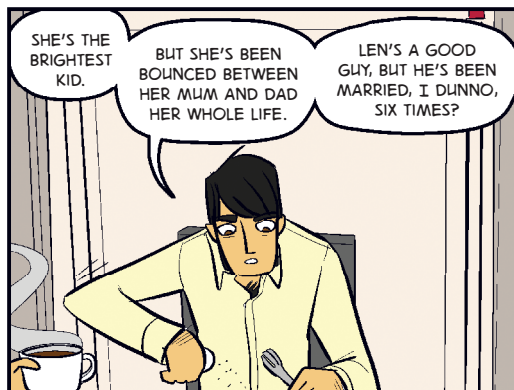
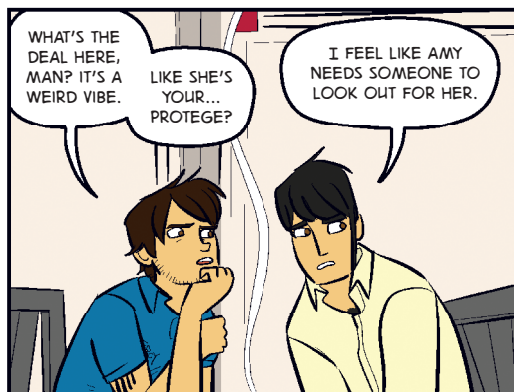
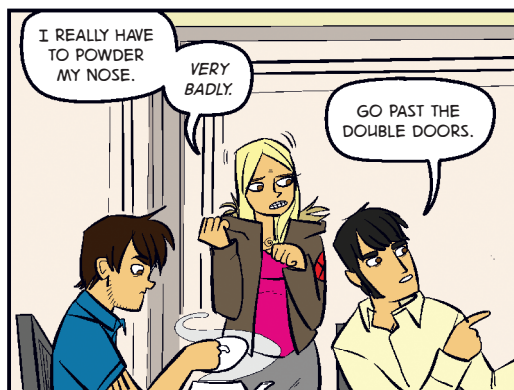
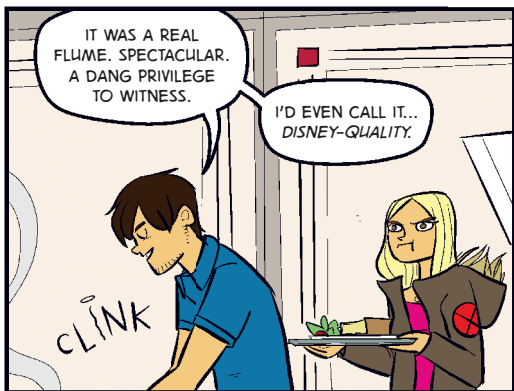
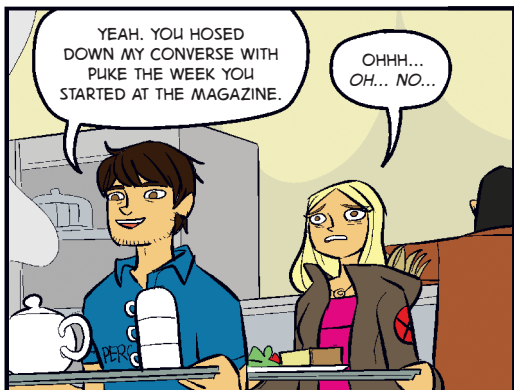
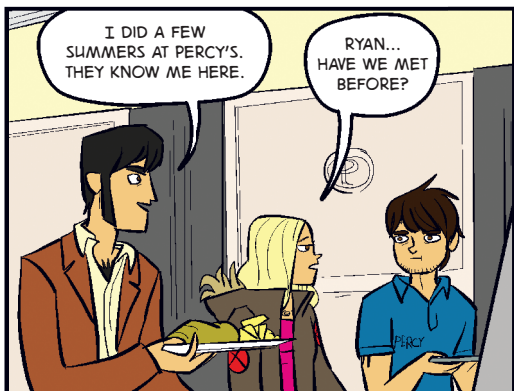
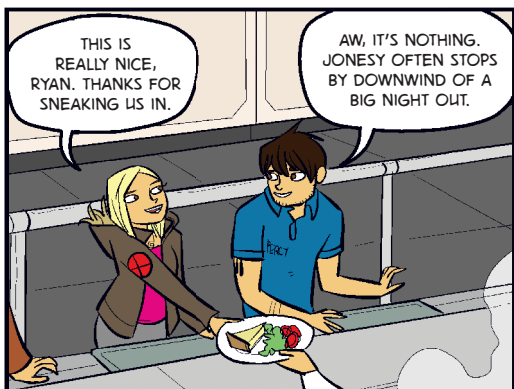
HE MADE PROVISION THAT WORKERS COULD SIT DOWN TO A HOT MEAL "WHENEVER THE WHEELS TURN".

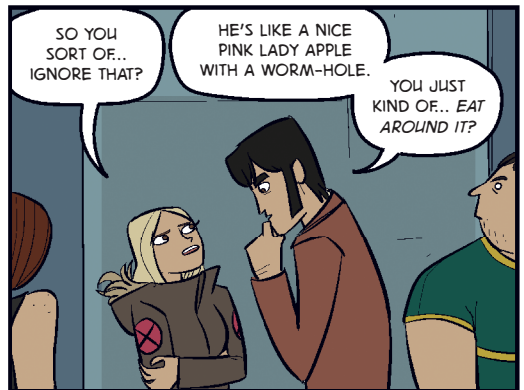
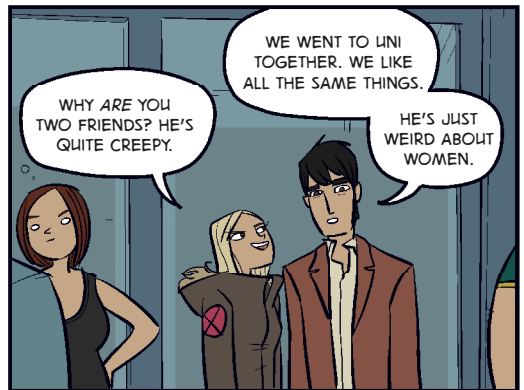
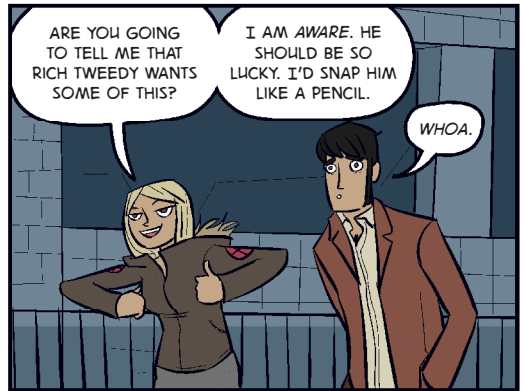
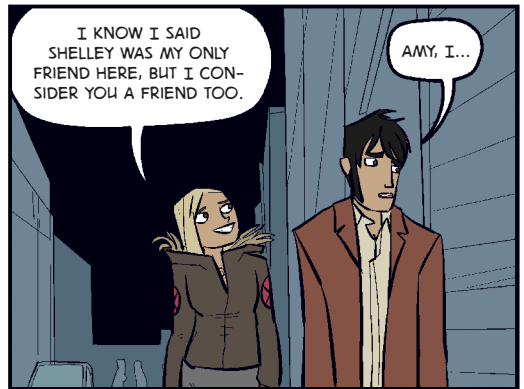
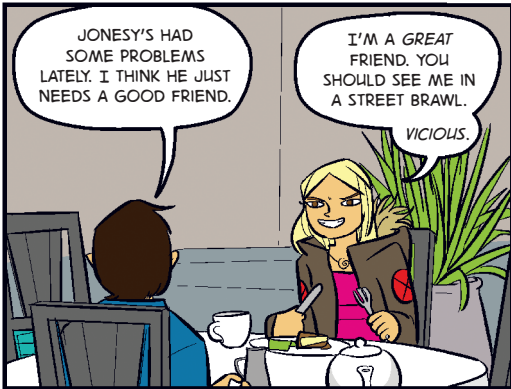
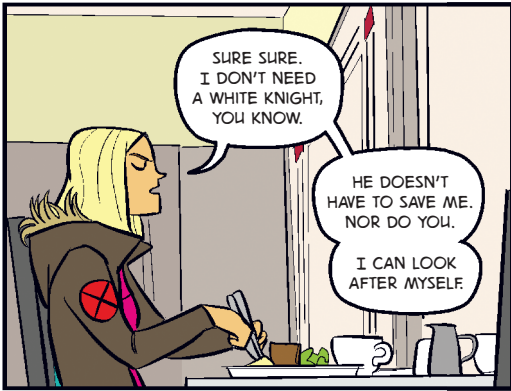
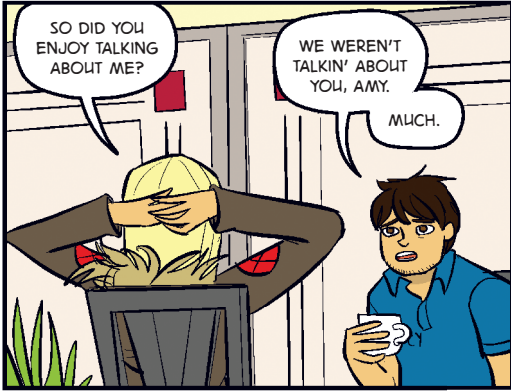
ART DECO! WOW. THIS IS LIKE... A MAGICAL WORLD.

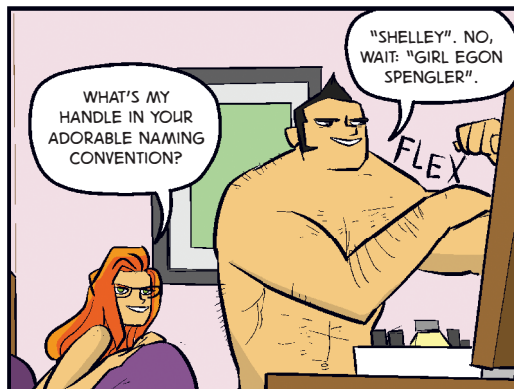
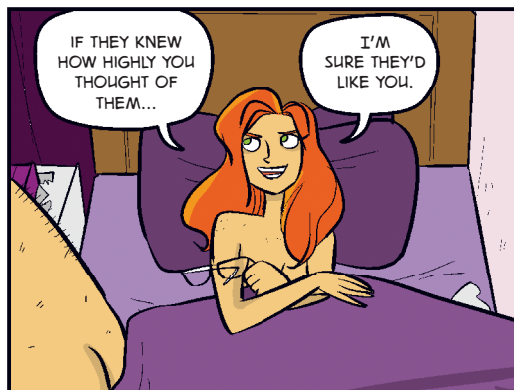
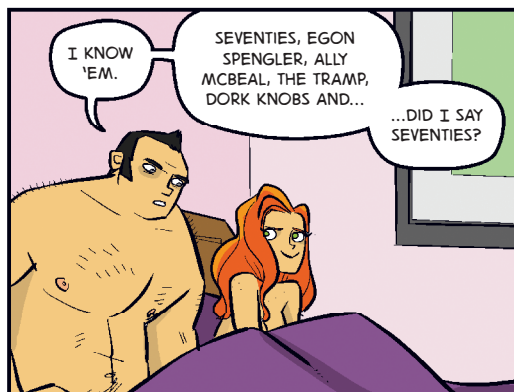
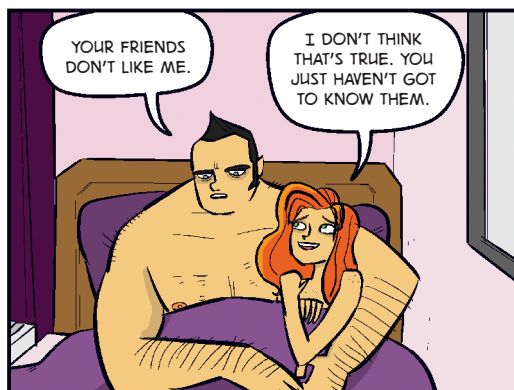
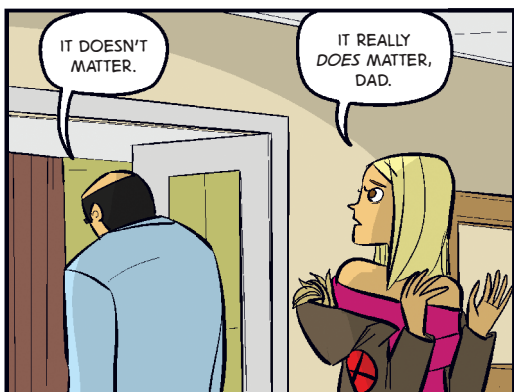
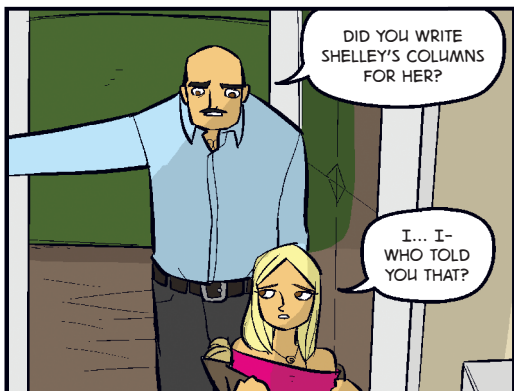
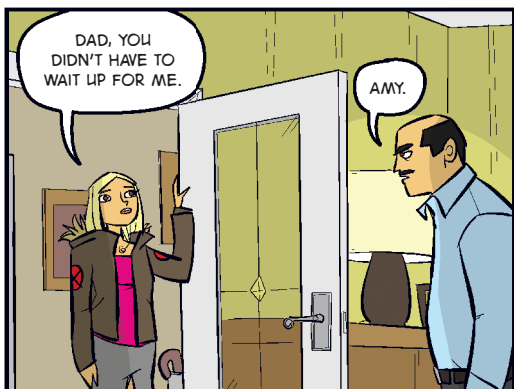


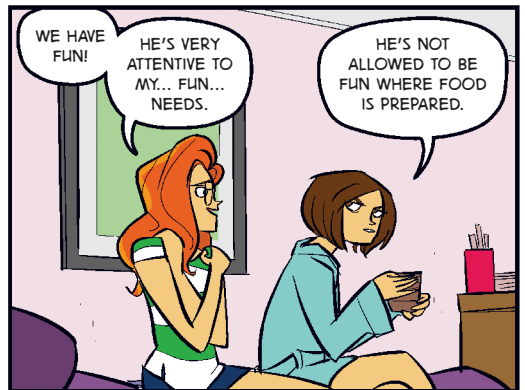
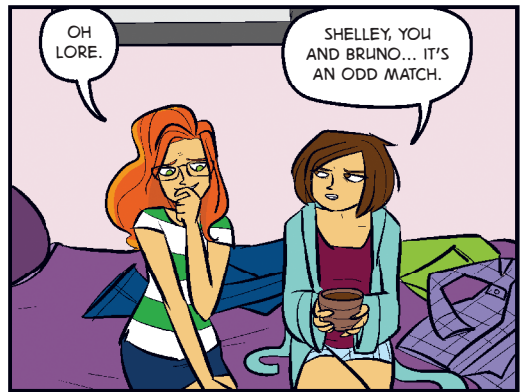
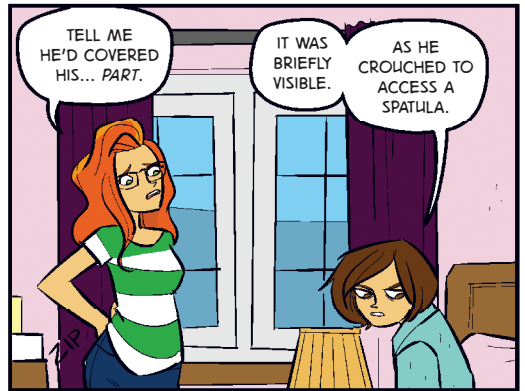
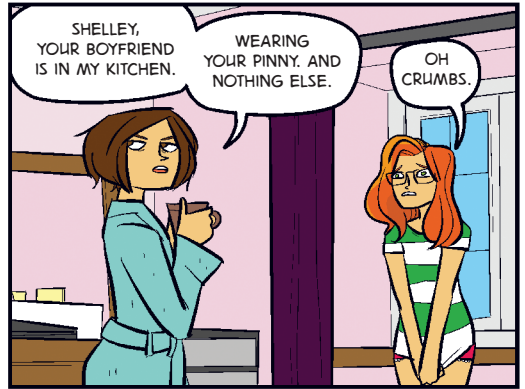
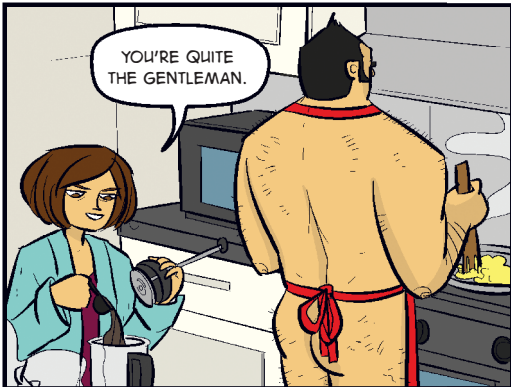
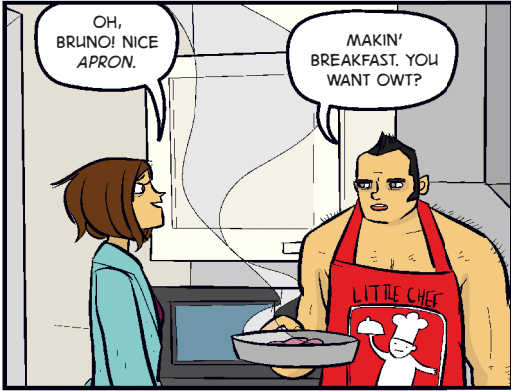
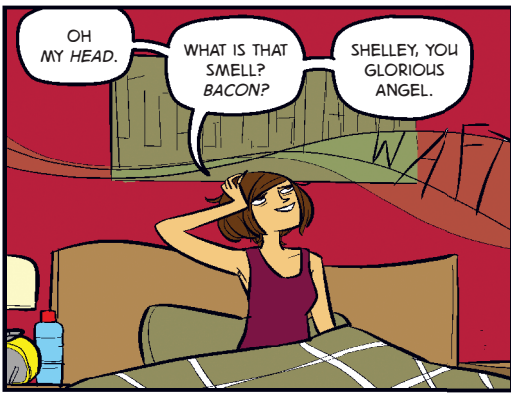
IT'S IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT WE SPEND EIGHT HOURS A DAY CANNING PEAS.

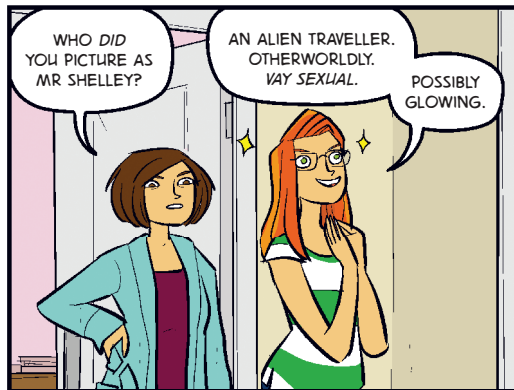
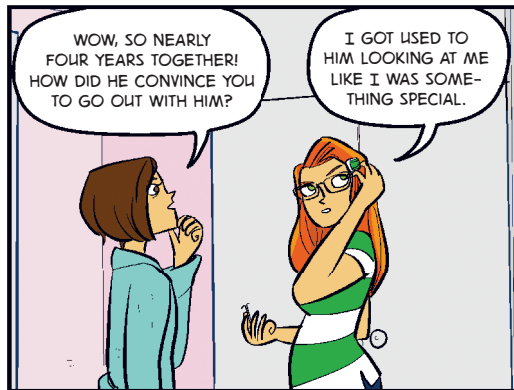
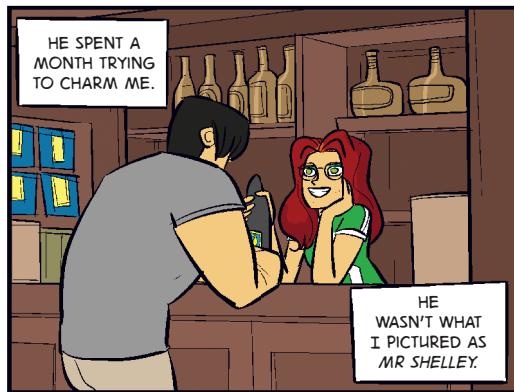
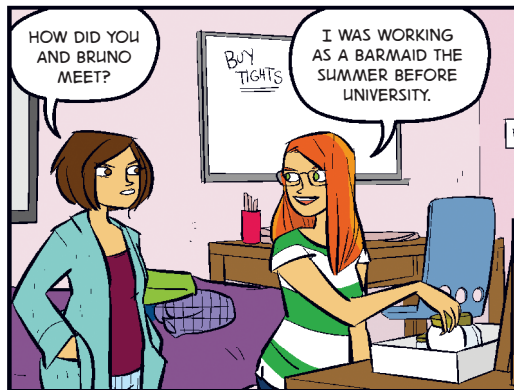
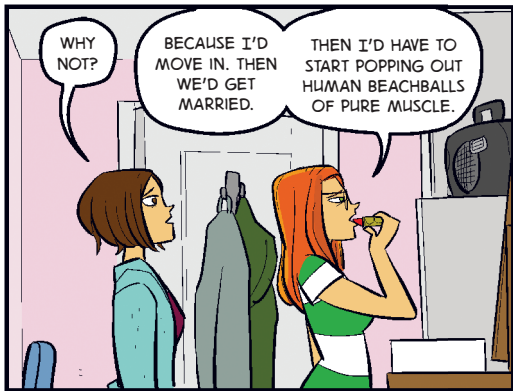
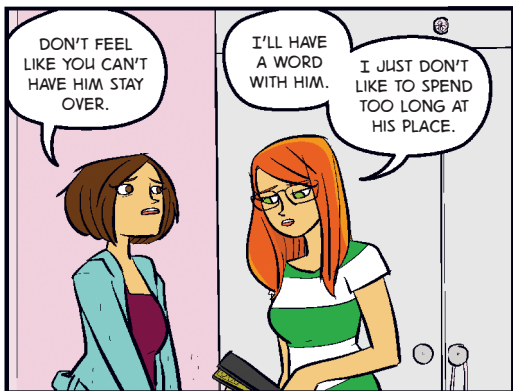
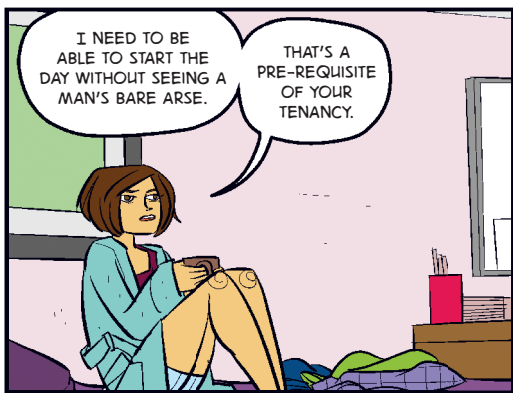
YOU ONLY GOTTS TO REMIND PEOPLE OF THEIR BASIC HUMANITY WHEN YOU MAKE A LIVING DENYING IT.











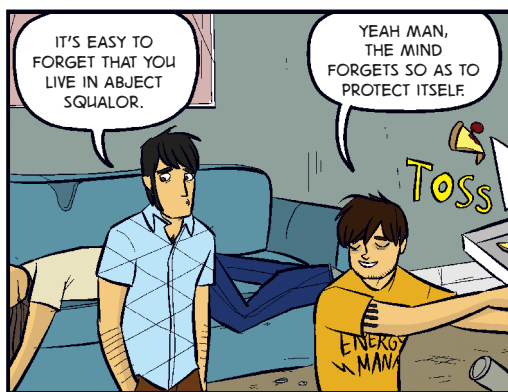
EPILOGUE

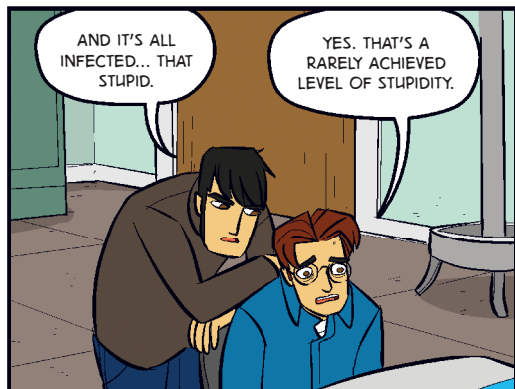
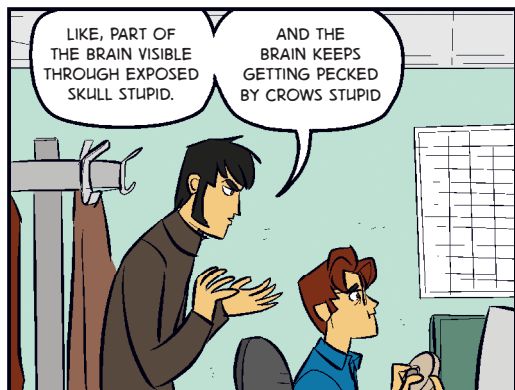
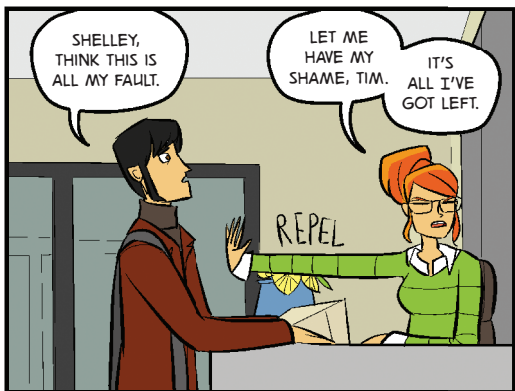
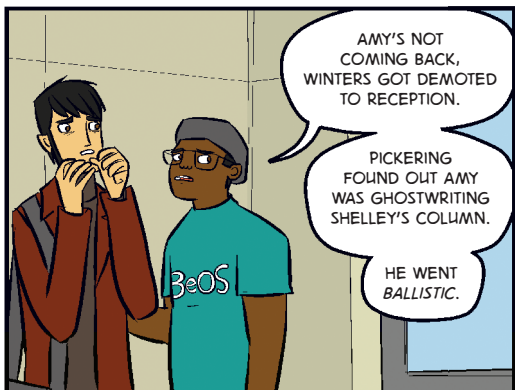
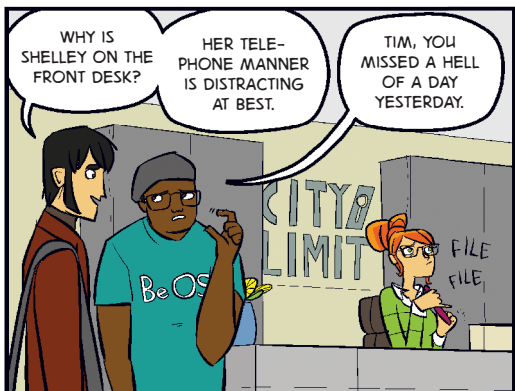
These last six pages should have been the start of another arc, but having unexpectedly had to run these comics daily on my website for a couple of months in place of the stories people expected out of necessity, I felt it was time for a break. They were only ever meant to be a B-feature, never the main event.

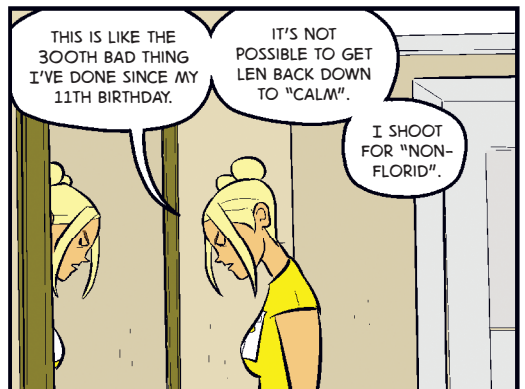
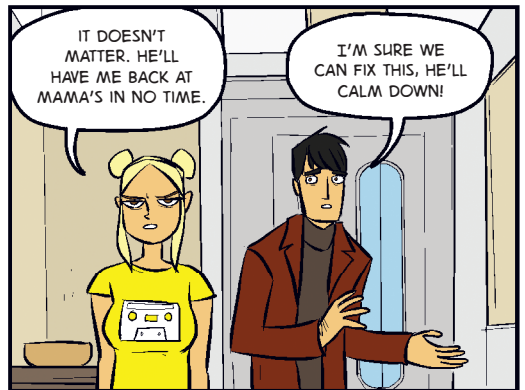
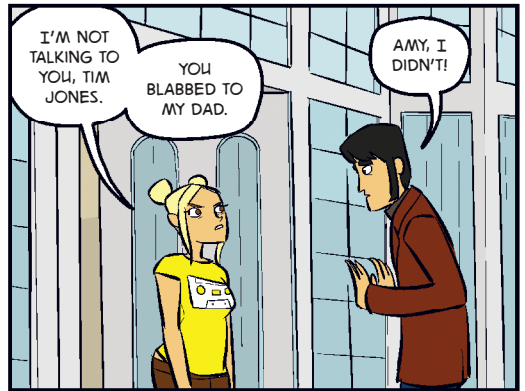
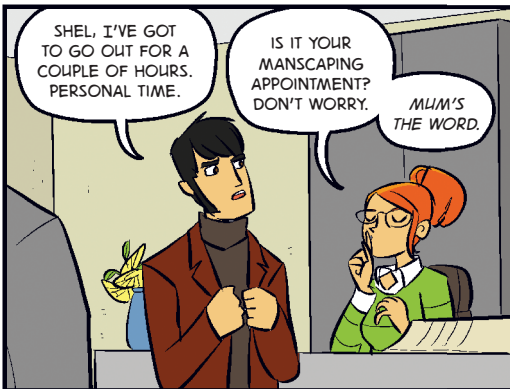
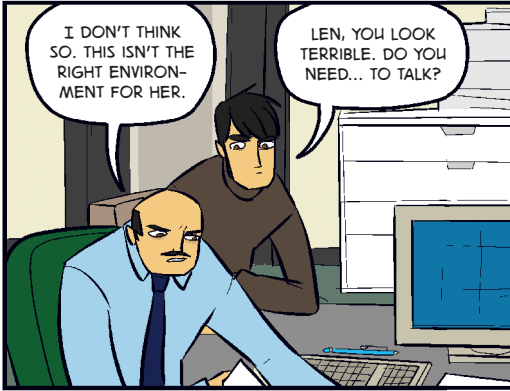
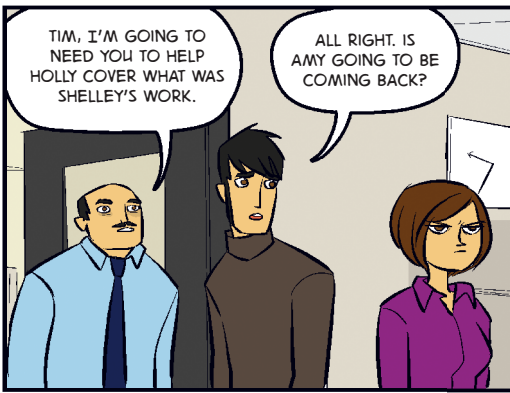
As fun as it is for me to explore this territory, it is arguably the most solipsistic thing I've ever done. And I say that as a person who is currently writing commentary on exactly that activity. I think I might be through the looking glass here.

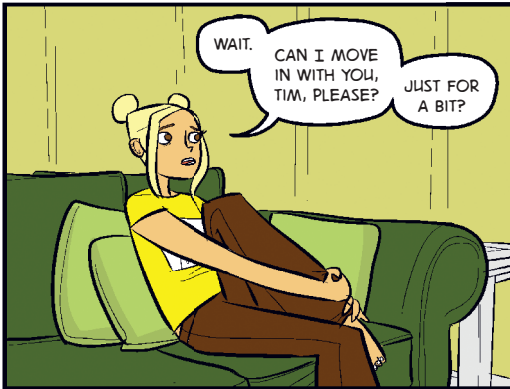
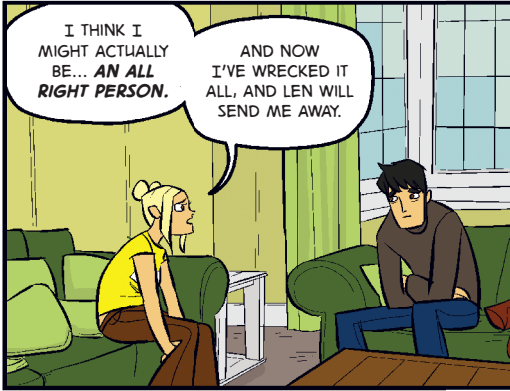
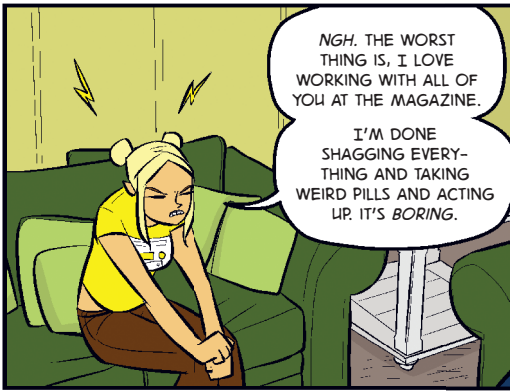
So the new old new Bobbins ends on a cliffhanger. Hopefully there will be another one of these collections in a year or so. In the meantime, keep watching the skies! And by the skies, I mean my website, where new comics should inevitably appear, just as a patched roof eventually lets the rain in, or a tiny piece of ground elder root left in garden soil will yield a whole new crop of pernicious weeds.

So what have we learned? That you can never go home again? That time heals all wounds? That a stitch in time... *saves nine*? I'm going to posit that the answer is "nothing at all". But hopefully you had fun finding that out.

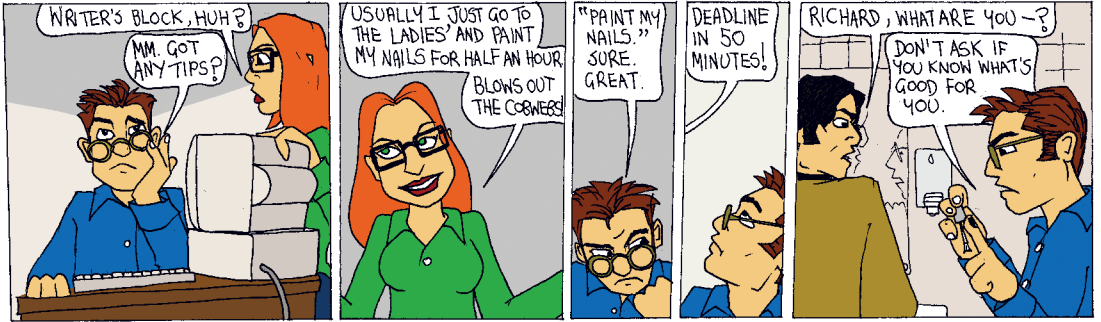








TO BE CONTINUED!



September 21, 1998

Other comics by John Allison

BAD MACHINERY SERIES (from Oni Press):

The Case of the Team Spirit
The Case of the Good Boy
The Case of the Simple Soul
The Case of the Lonely One
The Case of the Fire Inside
The Case of the Unwelcome Visitor

GIANT DAYS SERIES (from Boom!Box):

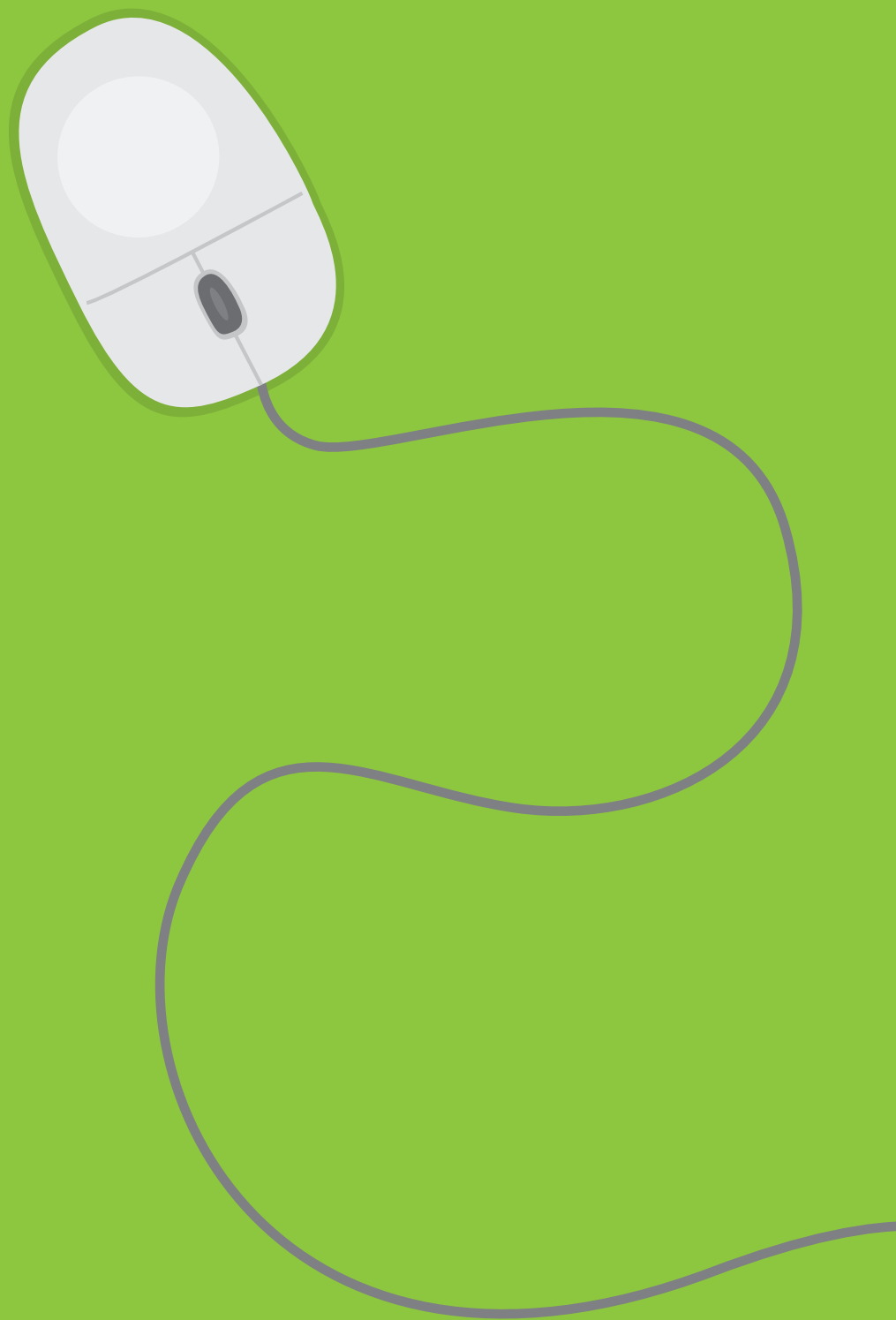
Issues 1-19+
Giant Days Volume 1 / 2 / 3

SCARY GO ROUND SERIES:

Looks Brains & Everything
Blame The Sky
Skellington
The Retribution Index
Great Aches
Ahoy Hoy!
Peloton
Recklessly Yours

Scareodeleria
Heavy Metal Hearts & Flowers
Girls Spy
Ghosts
Giant Days 1 / 2 / 3
Murder She Writes
THAT
Expecting To Fly 1 / 2
MORDAWWA #666

New comic pages weekdays at scarygoround.com



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