

## **Day in the Life -- Lair**

### **Ghost World**

ISBN: 1560974273

By Daniel Clowes

Fantagraphic Books 2001

Enid faces the summer after high school with no direction, little ambition, and is armed only with the ability to snidely quote from pop culture and play practical jokes on unsuspecting acquaintances. Her partner in crime, Rebecca, despite once embracing aimlessness, is beginning to become one of "them" -- getting a job, admitting responsibility, and just generally growing up. The waiting and awkward situations that permeate this book are at times uncomfortable but the characters are so riveting simply because they are so *true*.

*review by [robin](#)*

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### **9-11: Stories to Remember**

ISBN: 1563898810

By Will Eisner et. al.

DC Comics 2002

In the aftermath of 9/11, many authors, columnists, reporters, and filmmakers attempted to put their feelings into their art. The comics industry was no exception. Within a month, all of the major publishers worked together to produce a series of graphic novels collecting a star list of authors' reactions and stories from that unforgettable day. The breadth of talent and experience that went into these books is astounding unto itself, and as the stories begin to process the damage and rekindle hope, so can the reader.

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### **Dropsie Avenue: The Neighborhood**

ISBN: 1563896893

by Will Eisner

DC Comics 2000

There's a general perception, somehow, that small town life holds the key to community in this country. That's where you find the tales of ancestors past, traditions passed from generation to generation, and intimate knowledge of everyone and everything worth knowing. Will Eisner, known as one of the greats of comic art, is also a confirmed city-dweller, specifically New York and all its distinctive burroughs, histories, and neighborhoods. With **Dropsie Avenue**, he tells us in no uncertain terms that small town America has nothing on one street in New York. All of the petty differences, new ideas, and old traditions mix on the Avenue, forcing some old timers to leave in disgust just as new residents arrive with new hope. Taking us all the way from Colonial New Amsterdam to today's suburbanite glory, this epic story elegantly proves that old adage, the more things change, the more things stay the same.

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### **The Diary of a Teenage Girl**

ISBN: 1583940634

by Phoebe Gloeckner

Frog Ltd., 2002

Minnie Goetze is fifteen years old when she writes the first page of her diary, the sequel to Gloeckner's *A Child's Life*. As the months go by, Minnie's initial revelation that she is sleeping with her mother's 35-year-old boyfriend becomes commonplace as her entries describe about two years worth of experiences that seem calculated to horrify grown-up readers. In many ways, what *Diary* does best is to show how a young teenager can adjust to a life of exploitative sexual encounters, drugs, academic failure, and nonexistent parental supervision until these incidents seem normal and no longer shocking. Minnie eventually finds some stability and continuity on her own, but it is a painful journey for the reader to watch her blunder from one disaster to another – the story indicts almost every adult (and many of the peers) Minnie encounters with the self-serving abuse of everyone around them. Minnie's final self-realization at the end of the novel is satisfying, but Gloeckner never lets her story rest for long in a moment when everything seems like it will turn out well. Readers are left with a keen sense of Minnie's worry and hopelessness, but also without a sense that Minnie will ever be emotionally mature enough to help herself, or to find anyone she can trust.

One of Minnie's few unqualified pleasures is comics. San Francisco in the mid-70's was home to one of the largest enclaves of "alternative" comic artists in the country, and the cameo appearances of R. Crumb, Aline Kominsky, and others throughout the story provide a lot of fun for both Minnie and any graphic-novel aficionados in her audience. Watching Minnie's artwork evolve as she chronicles her life in alternating typewritten text, traditional cartoon frames, singles images, and full-page comics can be more satisfying than her frustrating emotional journey. I don't think it would be a long shot to suggest that "comics save the day" in this story. In Minnie's experience, harmful and exploitative influences surround teens as they begin to explore the world on their own, but graphic novels and cartoon art provide a haven of safe and creative self-expression.

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### **Johnny Jihad**

ISBN: 1561633534

By Ryan Inzama

NBM Publishing 2003

**Johnny Jihad** is a provocative and thoughtful look at the al Qaeda terrorist movement and role of American foreign policy in Middle Eastern politics. With crisp black and white illustrations Ryan Inzama tells the story of how a boy from New Jersey ends up in Afghanistan in September 2001.

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Johnny is one of America's disaffected youth. His grades are mediocre at best. He is bored with his life, but has no sense that there is a better future that he can attain. By chance he meets Salim at work. Through Salim he discovers a new sense of purpose and structure in Islam. Salim introduces him to Islam as a religious political movement, and Johnny embraces the radical politics. He soon takes Johnny to a training camp in up state New York where Johnny easily falls into the pattern of learning how to be a terrorist. Target practice, making bombs, and covert operations are all outlined in a "Training Manual for Jihad" which is as much a canon text in the camp as the Q'ran. It isn't until Johnny actually commits an act of terrorism that he begins to question this lifestyle, but by that point it is too late and he winds up in Afghanistan as an unwilling mole for the CIA. His time in Afghanistan cements his disillusionment with both the America he grew up in, and with the Islamic movement that he embraced.

This is a book for mature teens. It deals explicitly with violence and with the tragedy of 9/11. I think that it would be a fascinating book to use in a high school classroom as a starting point for a discussion about the intersection of religion and violence, the tensions in the Middle East, and the ways in which American foreign policies have contributed to the increasing violence against America and Americans. Librarians should be aware that the book presents points of view which could be controversial regarding the causes of 9/11.

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**How Loathsome**

ISBN: 1561633860

by Ted Naifeh and Tristan Crane

NBM: ComicsLit, 2004

"We were beautiful monsters, the kind this city thrives on, allows to flourish, and greedily destroys. Alone we felt like outcast aliens. Together we were perfect: too unusual and awful for anyone else." So begins Ted Naifeh's strange and haunting collage of drawings, photographs, and words, showing us a cast of characters as fascinating as they are flawed. You may have loved them from afar, aspired to join their ranks, grown tired and disillusioned in their company, or found comfort in their existence; if you've ever felt yourself on the outside looking in, you'll recognize someone you know.

Sulking on the borders of her city's drugged, gay, goth underground Katherine reflects with cynical lucidity on the foibles, loves, vices, and transcendence of her fellow freaks and outcasts. After a week of drinking, shady dealings, and dubious sexual exploits Nick and Katherine meet in a bar to compare notes on the night before. Nick's coming down off of a bad trip and gleefully narrates a story of giant praying mantises and Germans with x-ray vision. Katherine is mulling over the implications of an inconclusive threesome with two of the local goth nightclub's most sought-after denizens. Two tales of strange sex and misunderstandings weave together into a tapestry at once repugnant and delightful, and this really sums up

**Escapo**

ISBN: 1882402146

by Paul Pope

NBM Publishing, Inc. 1999

The circus has always held a great allure for storytellers - who can resist the wonderful contradictions of the center ring and the freak show, the blaring showmanship and the everyday lives of the performers? In Escapo, Paul Pope draws inspiration from a very familiar circus trope: scarred but talented escape artist Escapo loves the beautiful trapeze artist, though she seems to be unmoved by his affection. Working his way through a series of terrifying escape machines, Escapo tries to figure out if he can profess his feelings or if he should simply leave well enough alone. Pope's fluid and sinuous black and white style lends the long moments of escape and contemplation energy and melancholy beauty. You'll also find that though this tale has been told many times, this time around it doesn't work quite as you'd expect, with a satisfying and affirming finish.

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**The Tale of One Bad Rat**

ISBN: 1569710775

By Bryan Talbot

Dark Horse Comics 1995

Taking off from the sweetness of Beatrix Potter's world, this compelling graphic novel follows Helen Potter, a homeless girl trying to find her way on the streets of London. Helen manages to find company and shelter of a kind, but her own nightmarish past keeps destroying her peace and her ability to reach out. After one frightening incident, Helen abandons the city to seek the comfort of her youth, the tales of Beatrix Potter, by finding the next best thing -- Potter's house in the English countryside. No matter how bright and green her new life is, however, Helen discovers she must confront her past before she can begin her future.

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