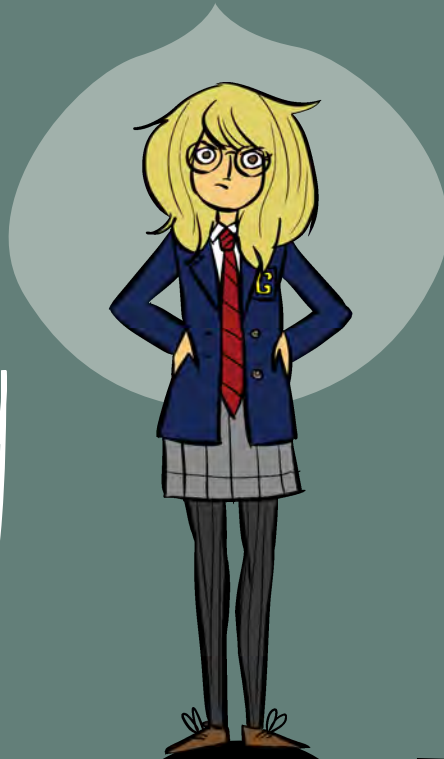


bad machinery

THE CASE  
OF THE



**LONELY**

**ONE**

JOHN ALLISON



# Bad Machinery™

**THE CASE OF THE LONELY ONE**



AN ONI PRESS PUBLICATION



# Bad Machinery™

## THE CASE OF THE LONELY ONE

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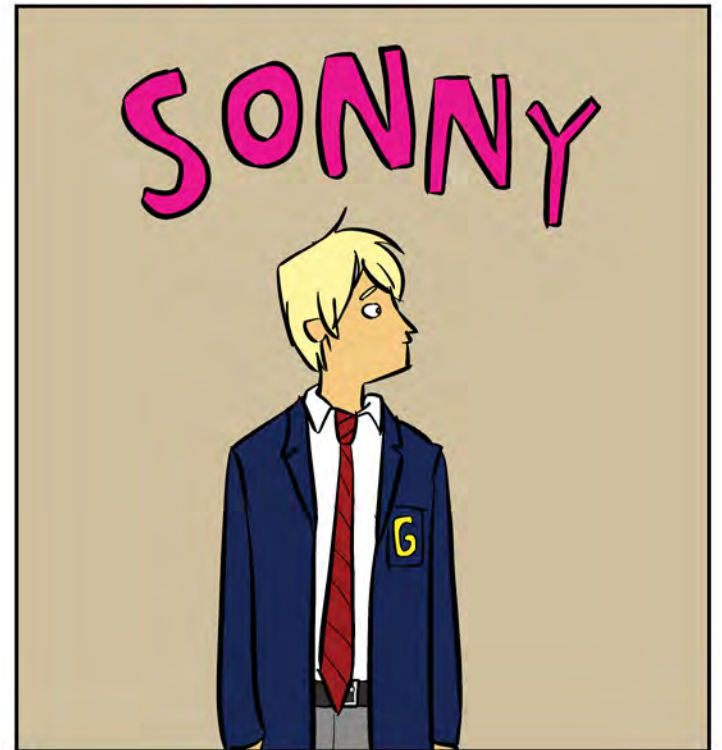
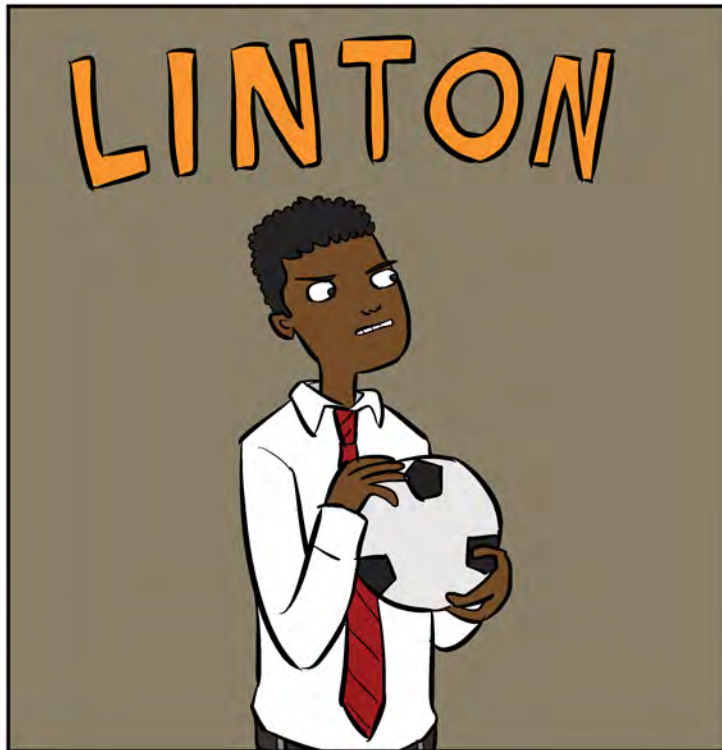
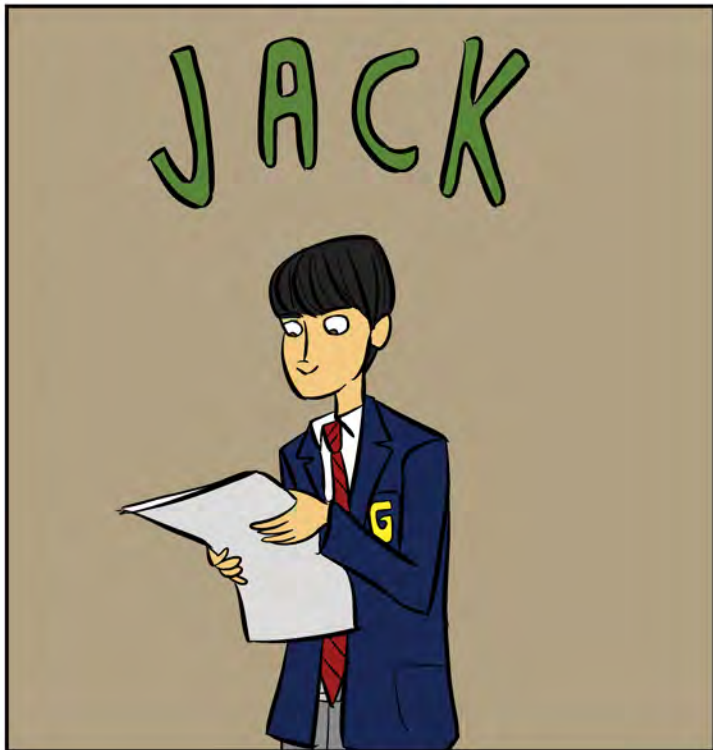
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LITTLE  
CLAIRE



COLM



MR BECKWITH



AMY BECKWITH-  
CHILTON



SUPER DEREK

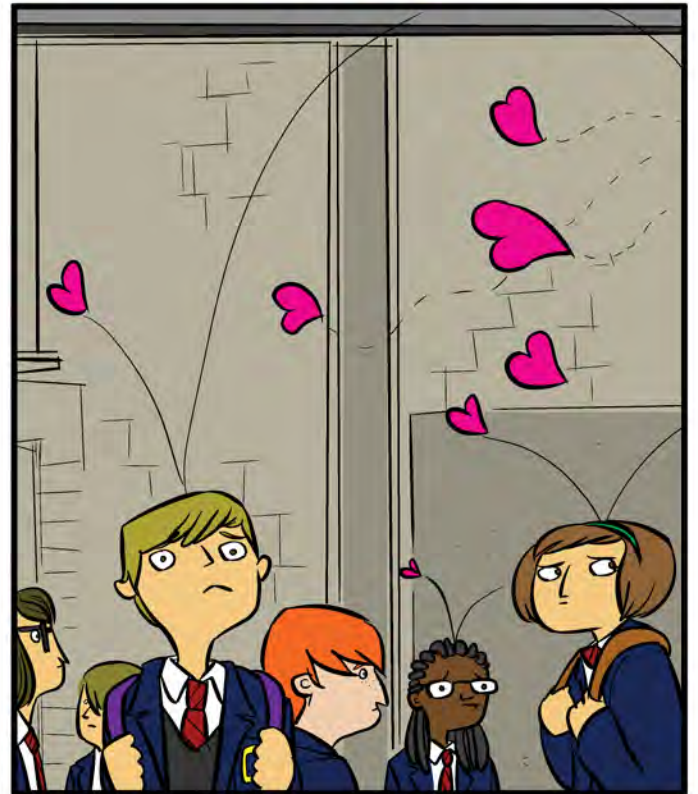
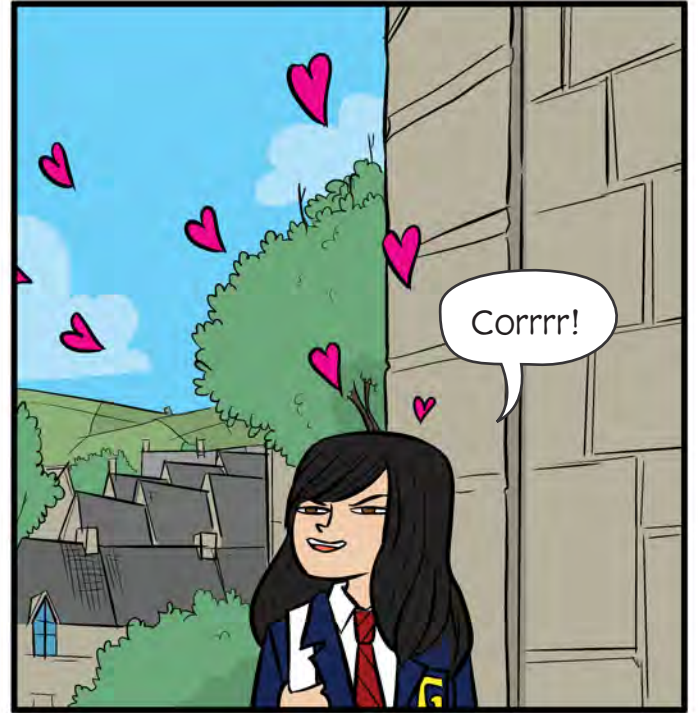
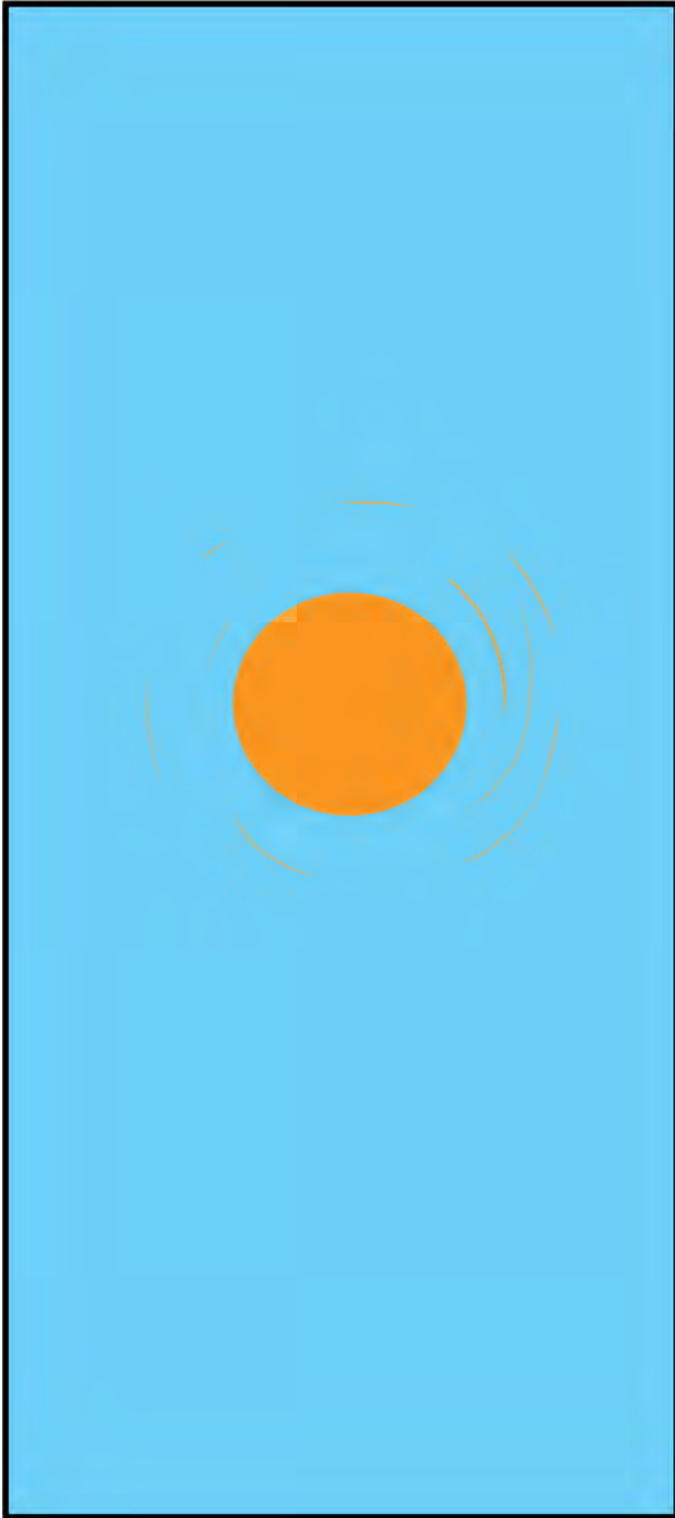


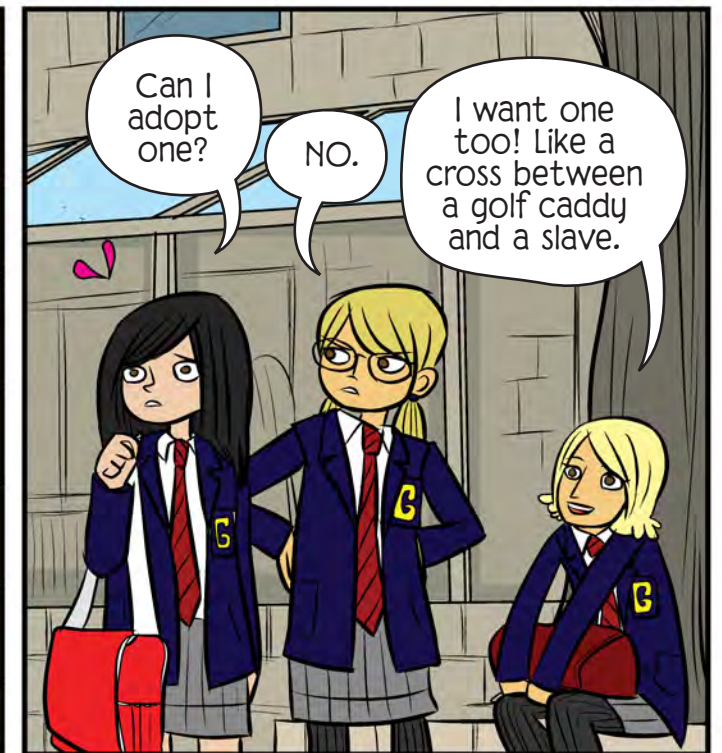
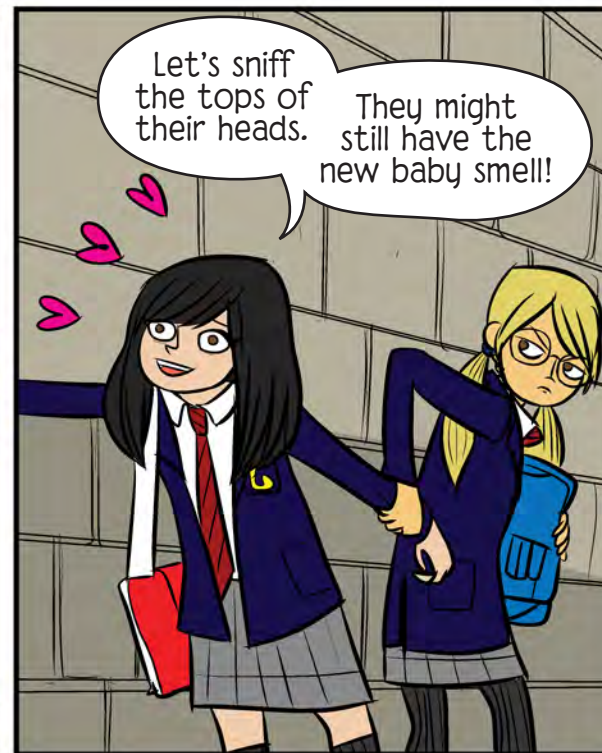
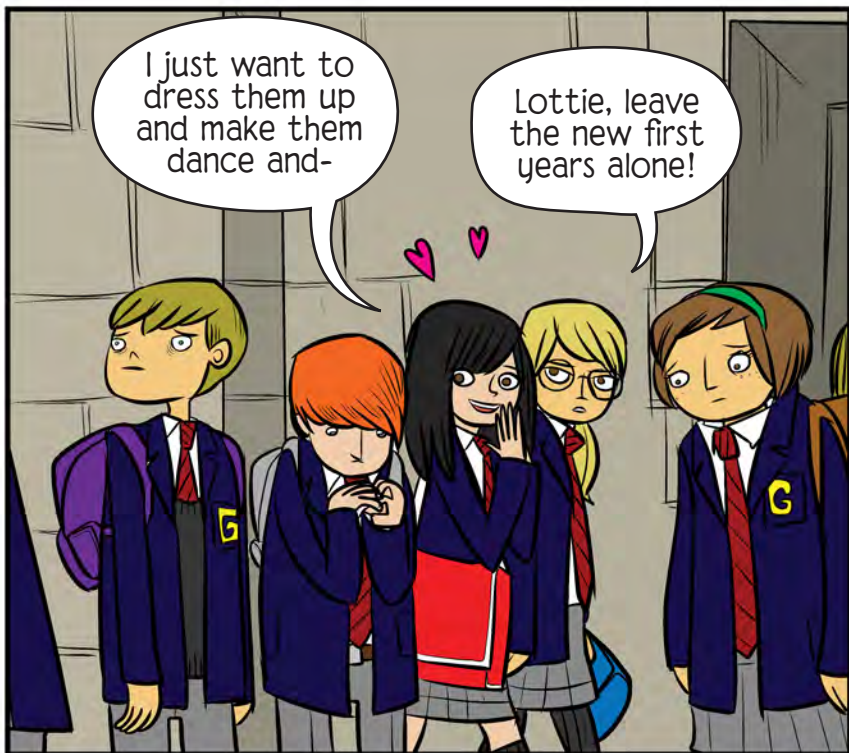
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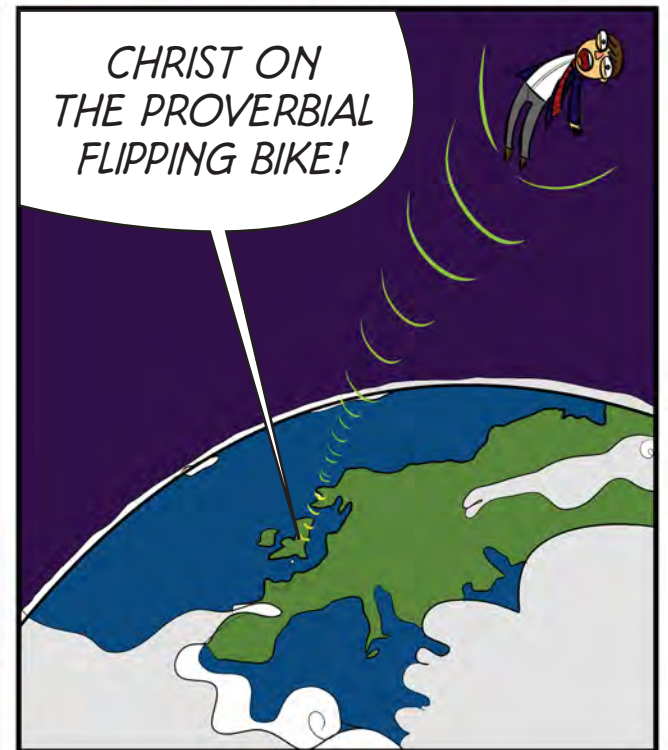
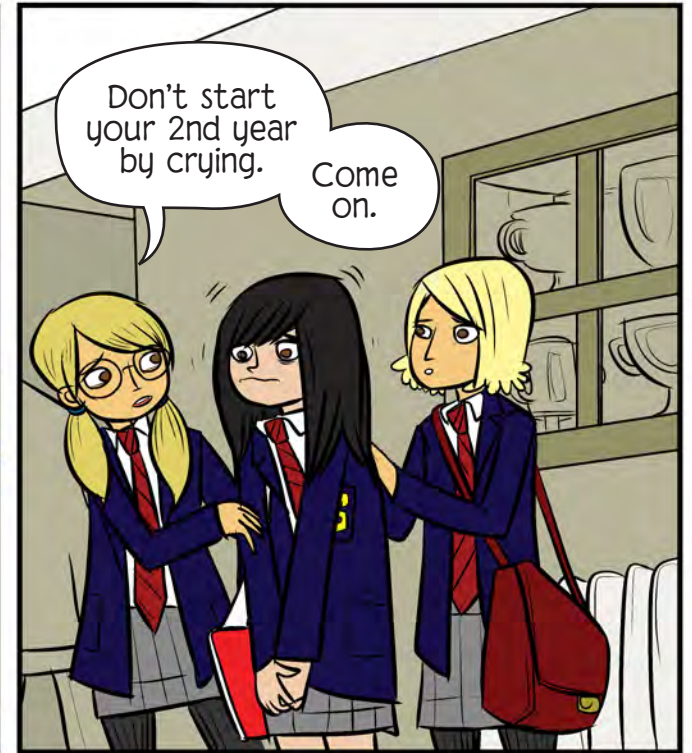
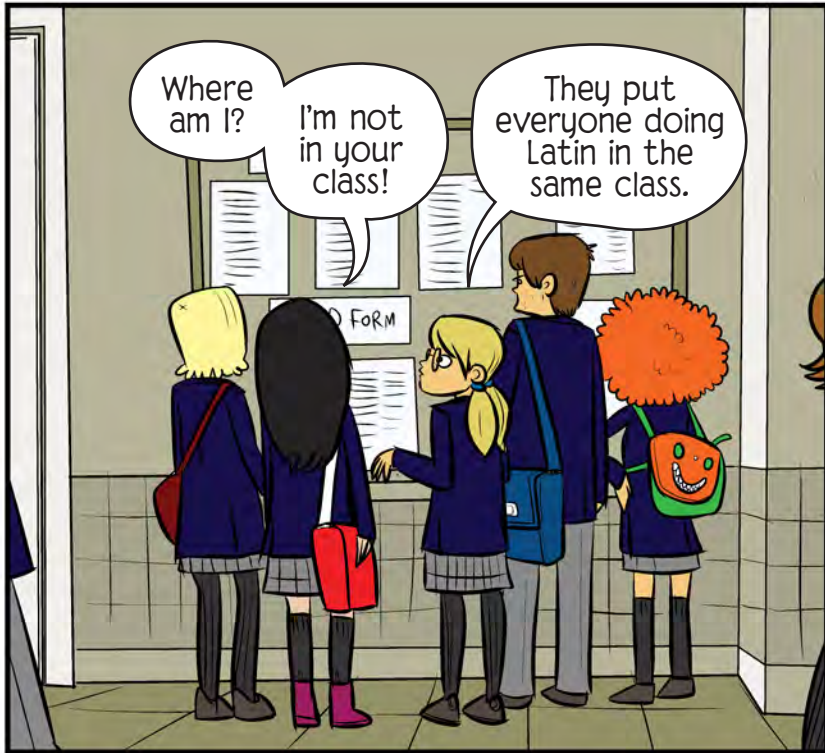


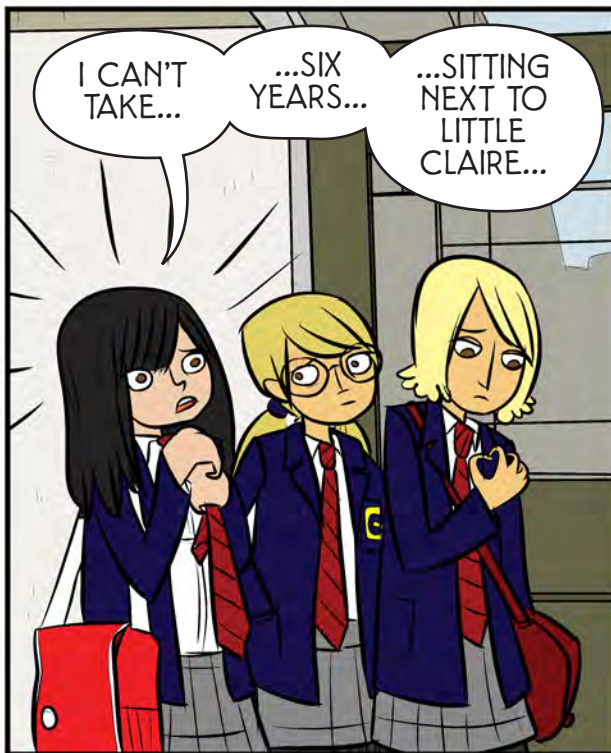
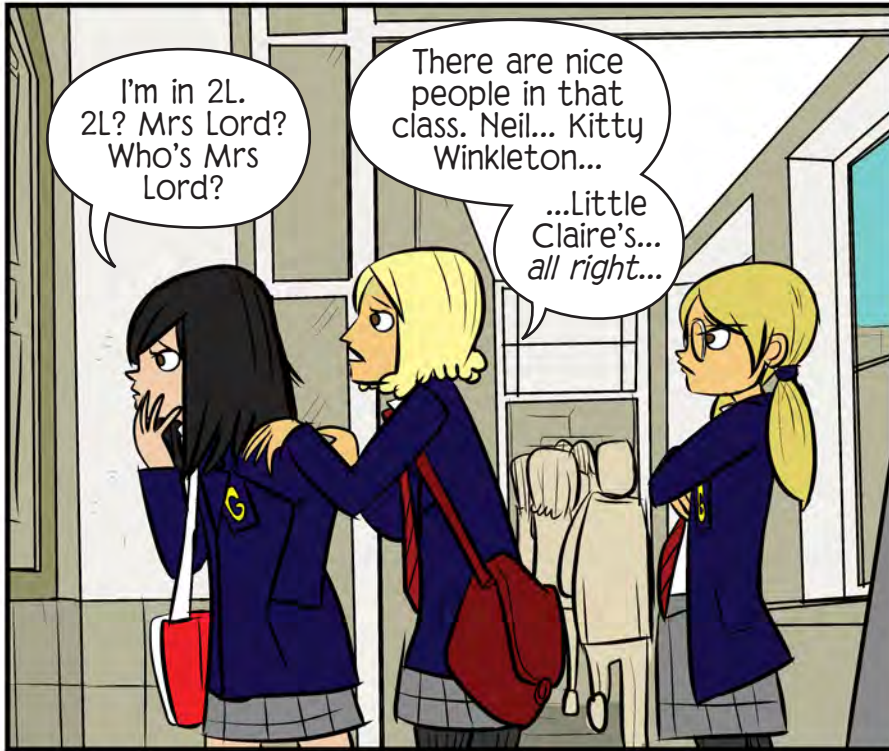


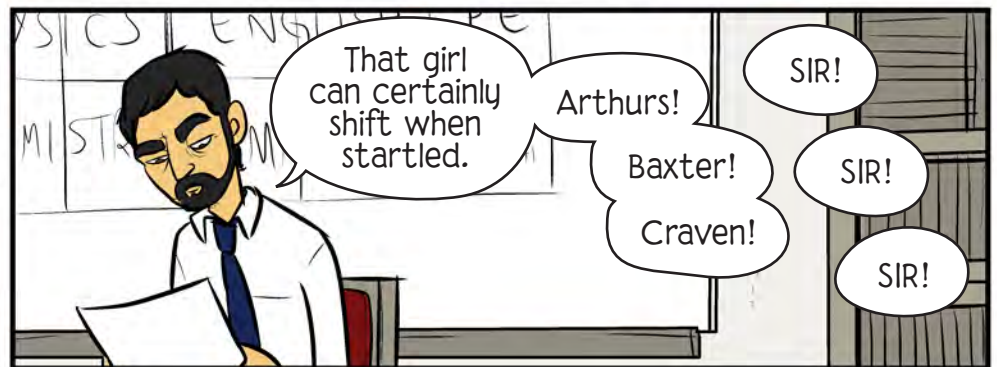
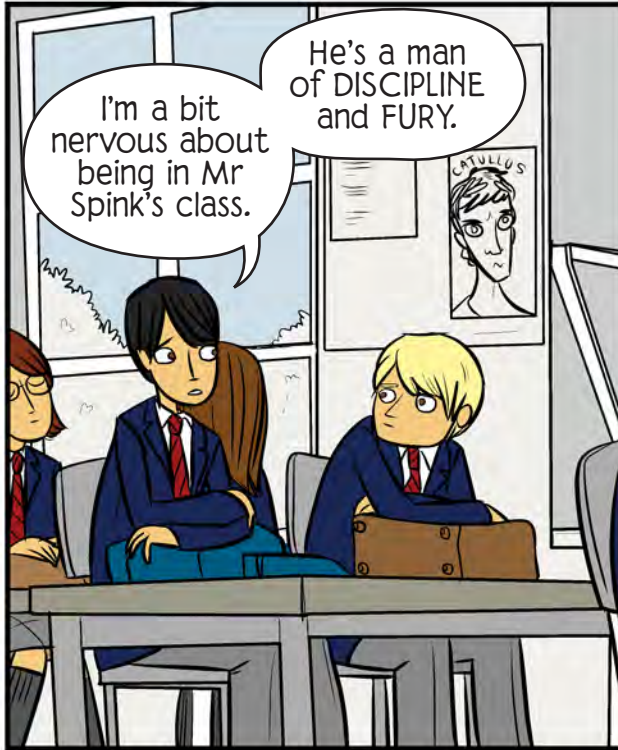


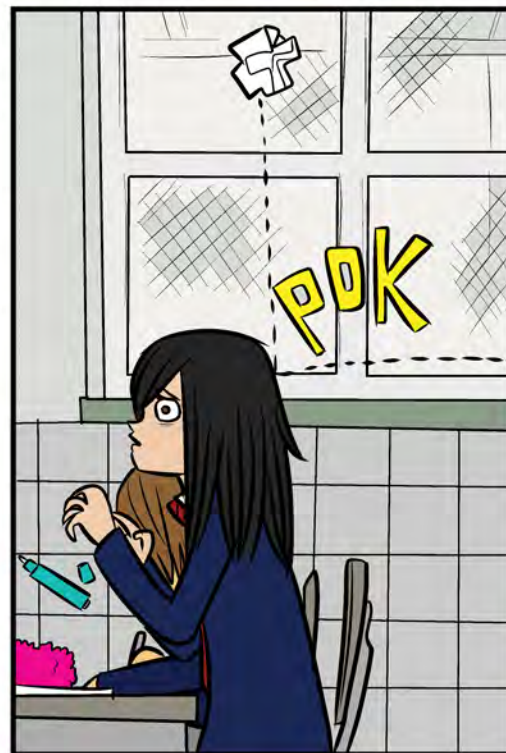
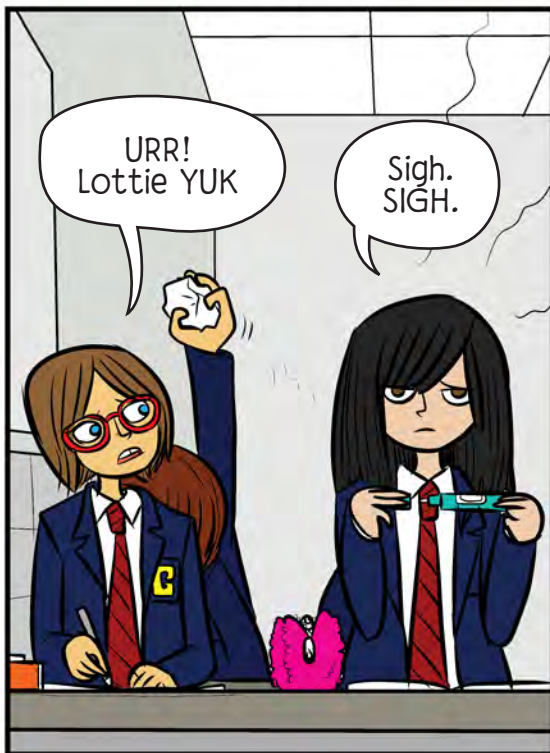
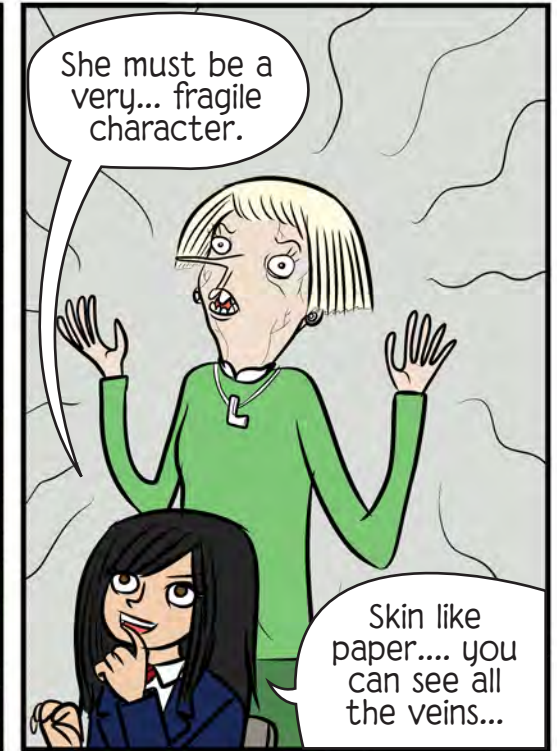
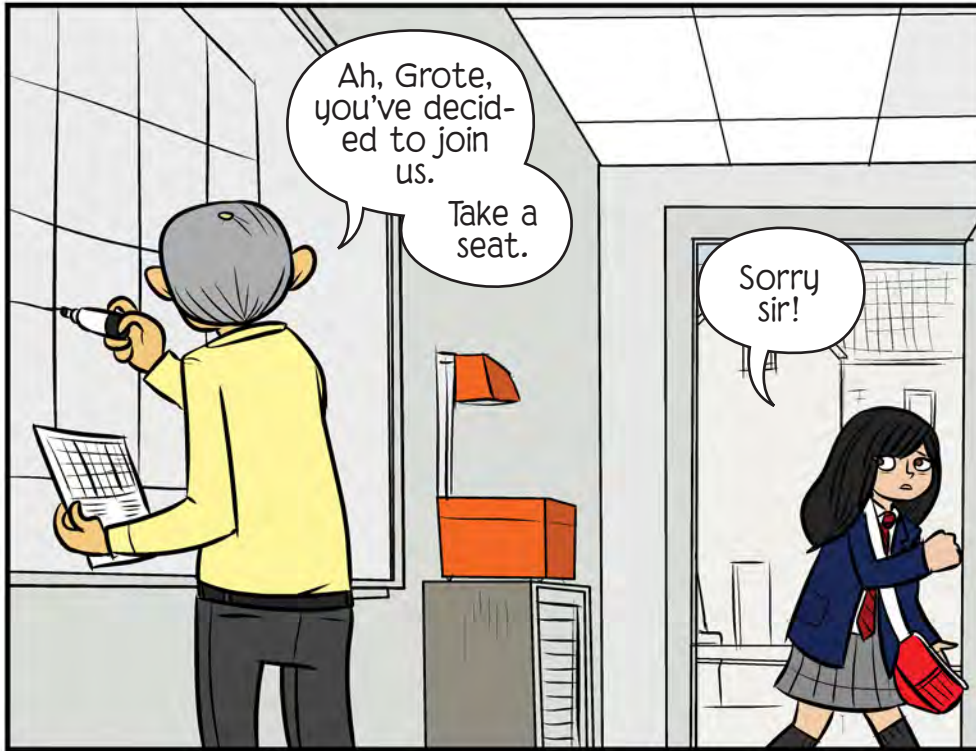


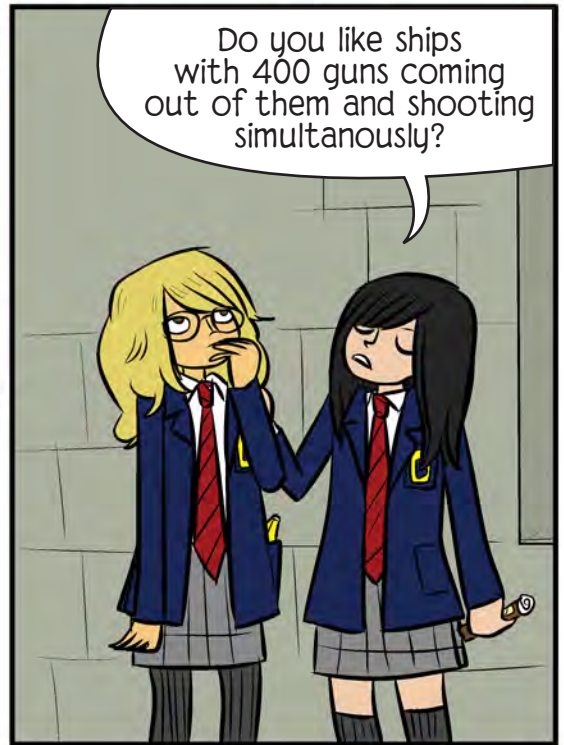
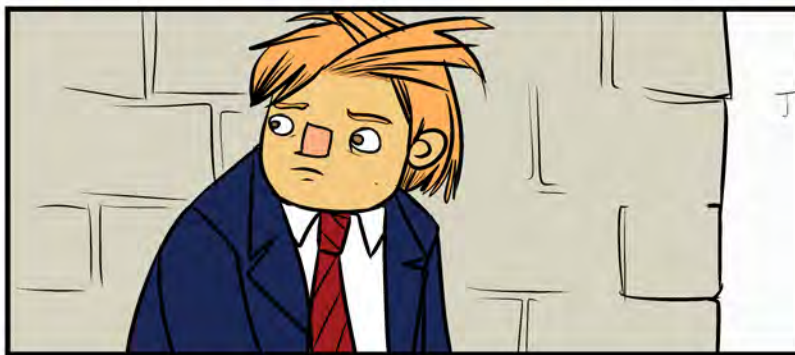
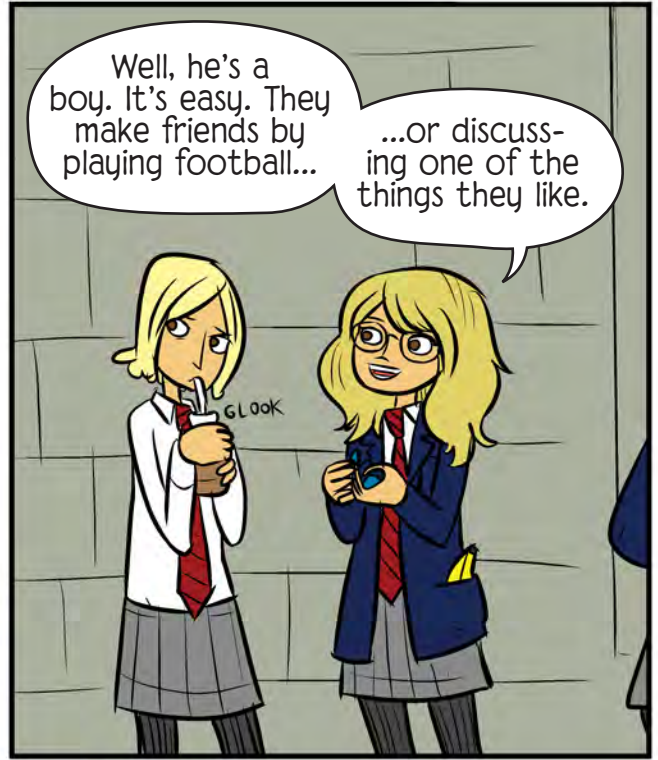
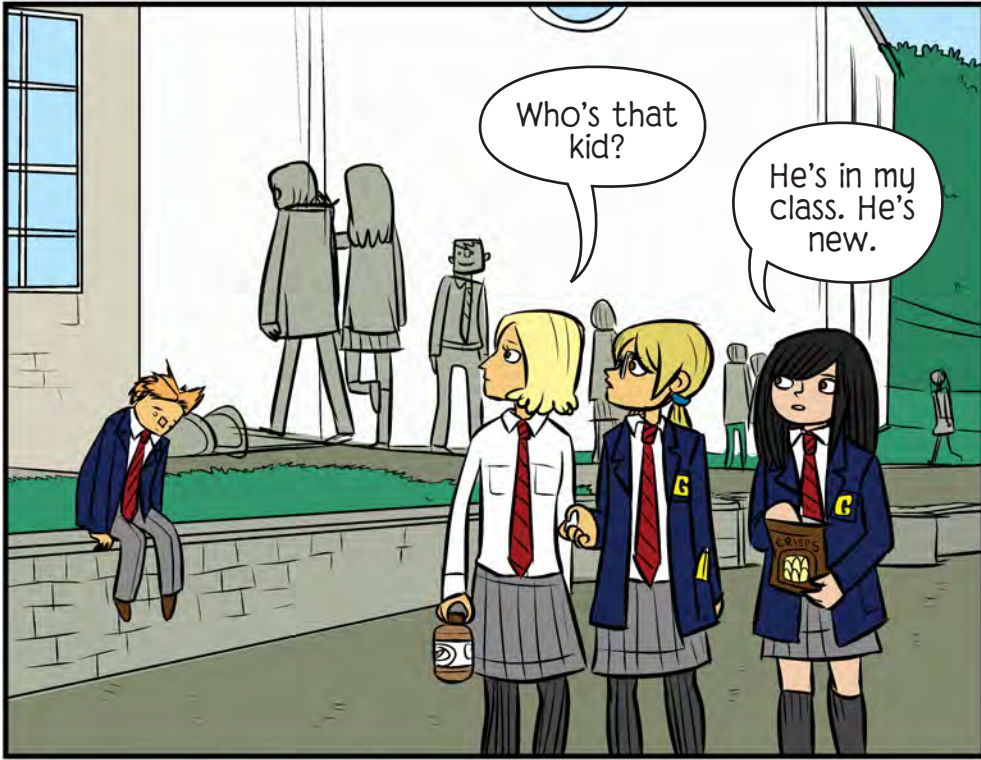


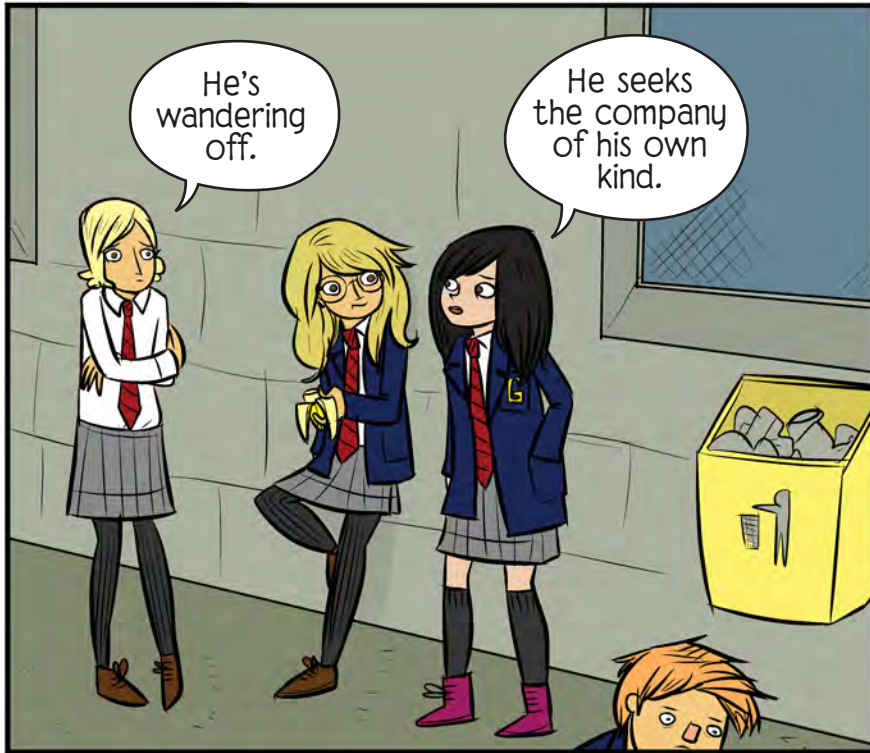












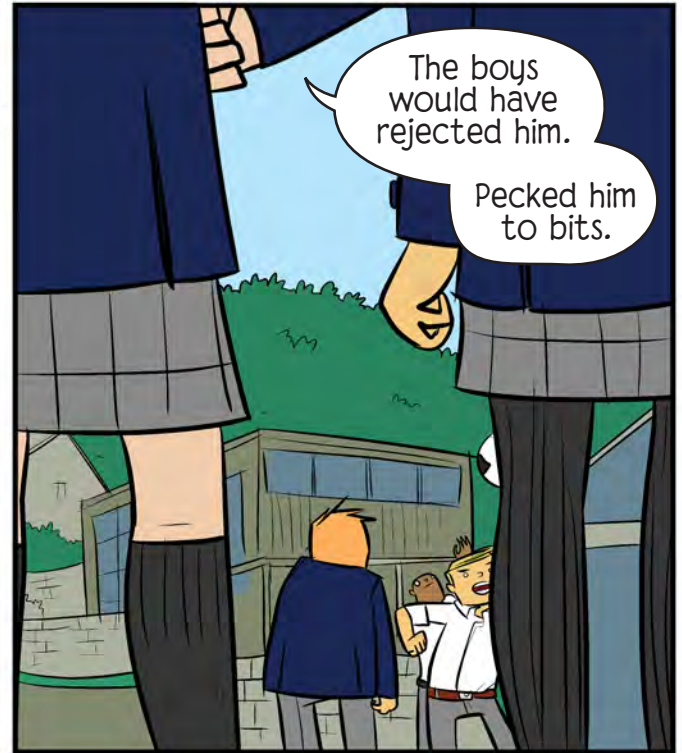
He's wandering off.

He seeks the company of his own kind.



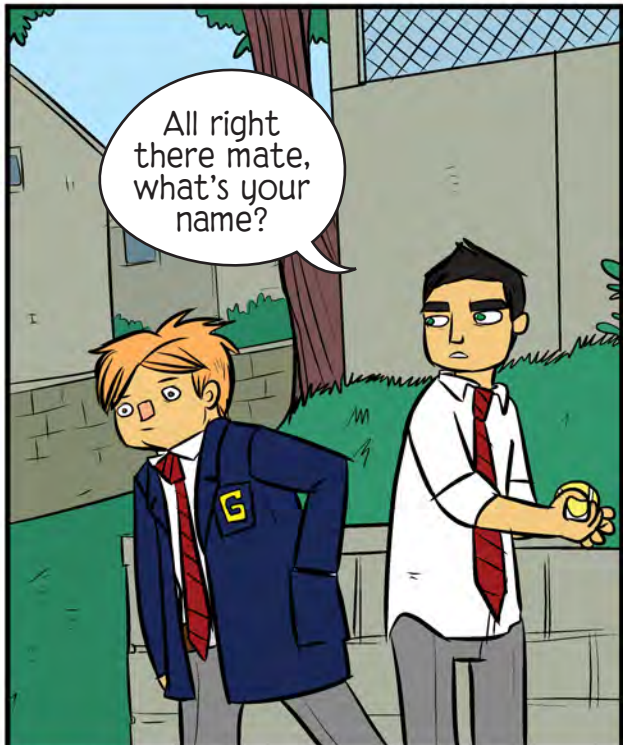
Are you sure we shouldn't have spoken to him?

No! We'd have put the stink of girls on him.



The boys would have rejected him.

Pecked him to bits.



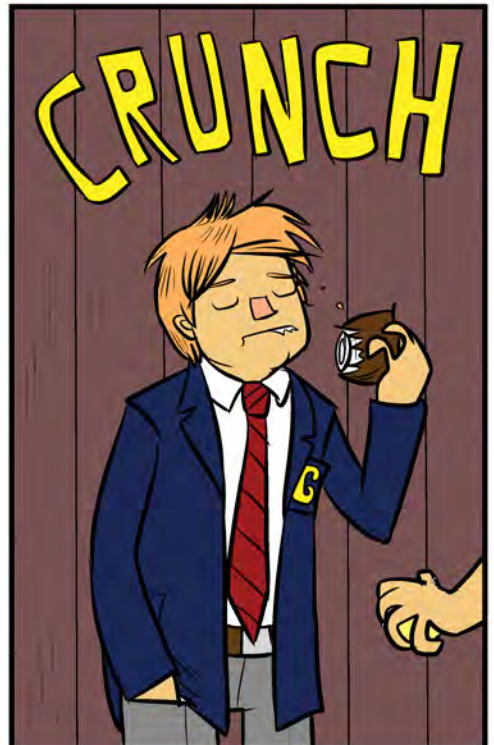
All right there mate, what's your name?



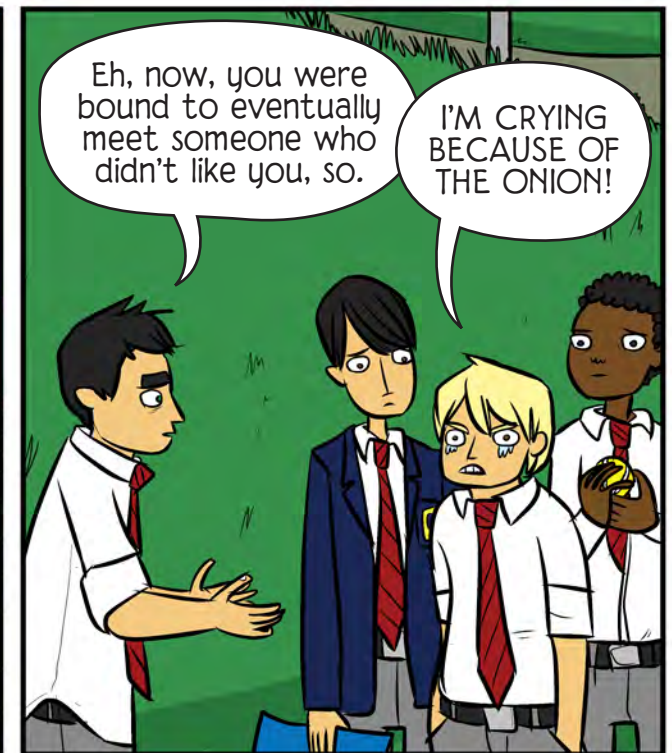
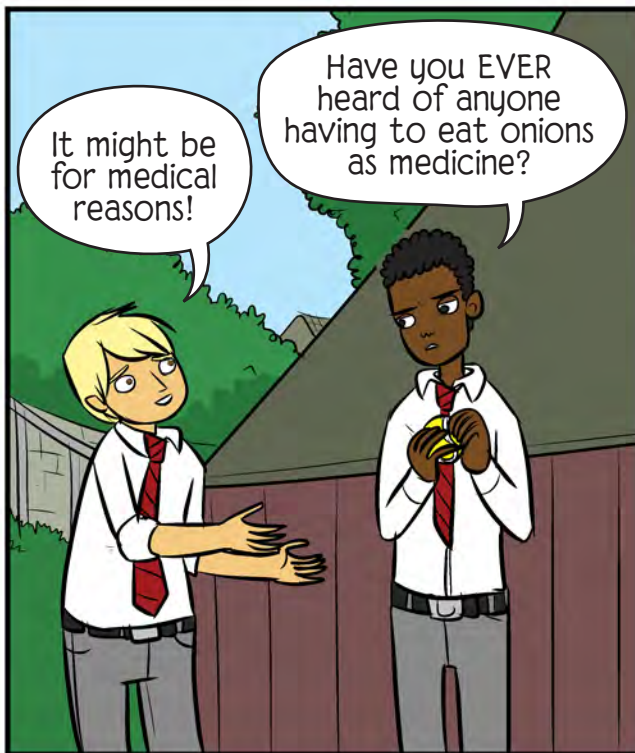
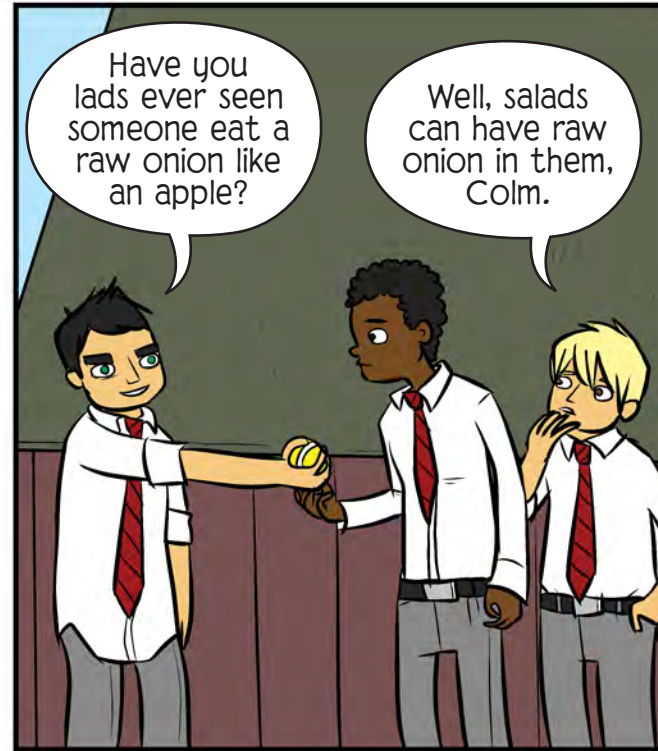
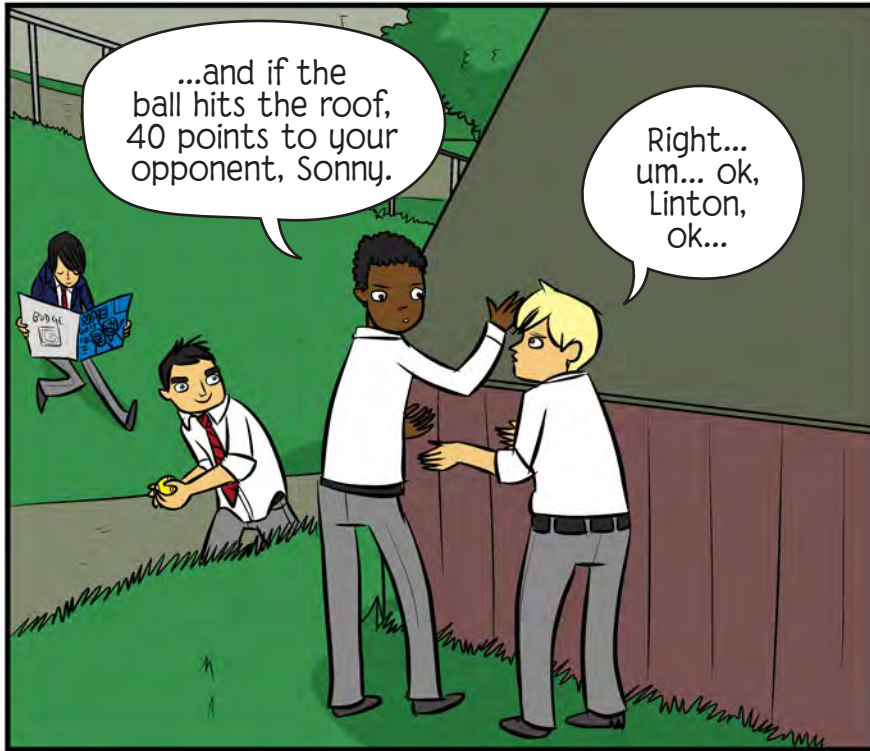
It's Lem. Would you like an onion?

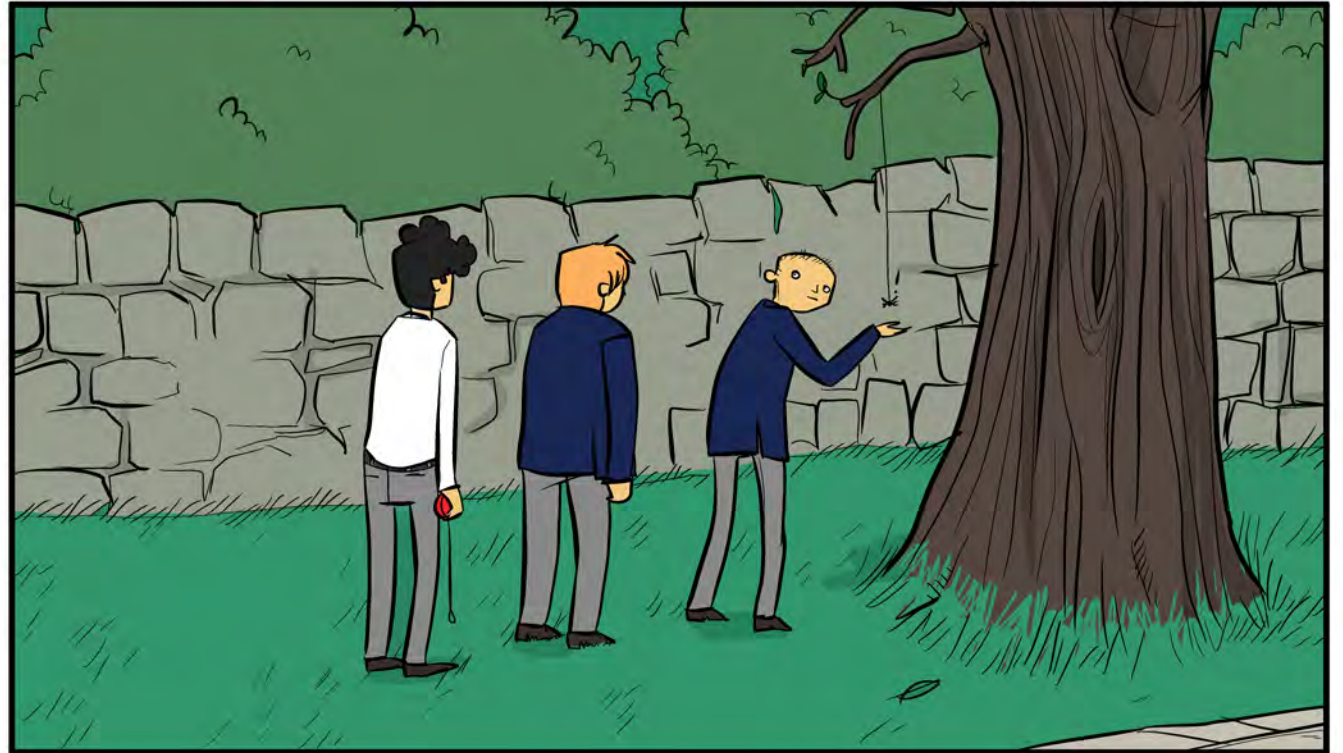


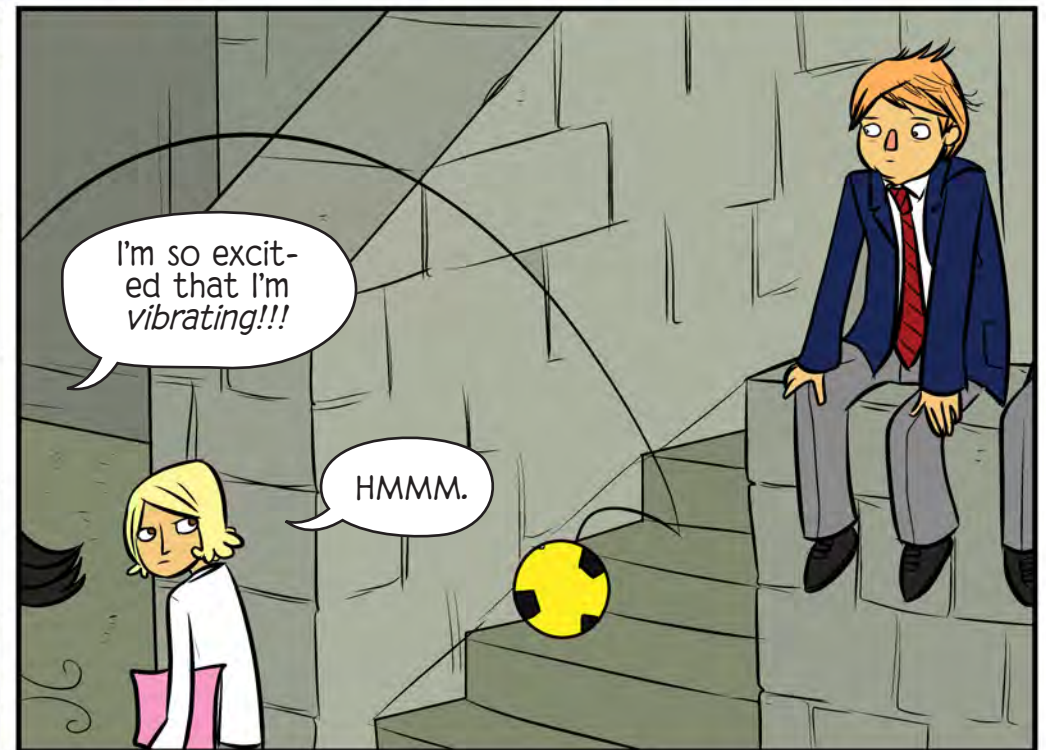
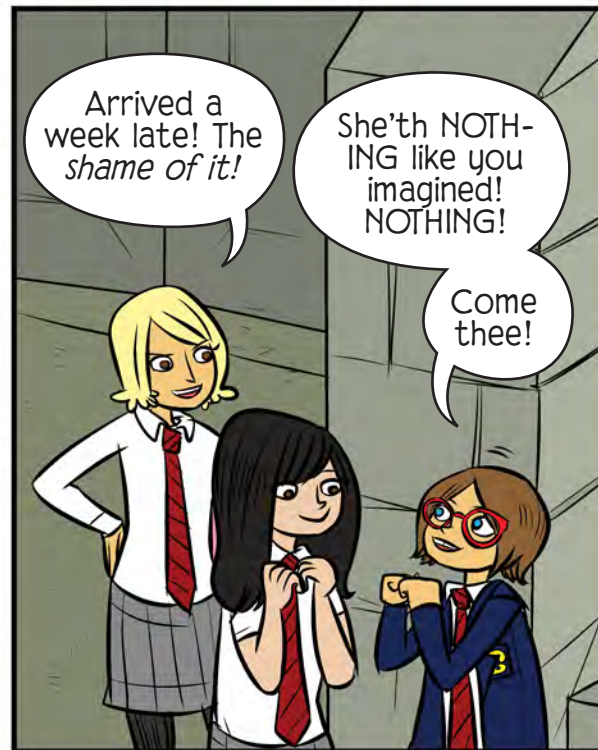
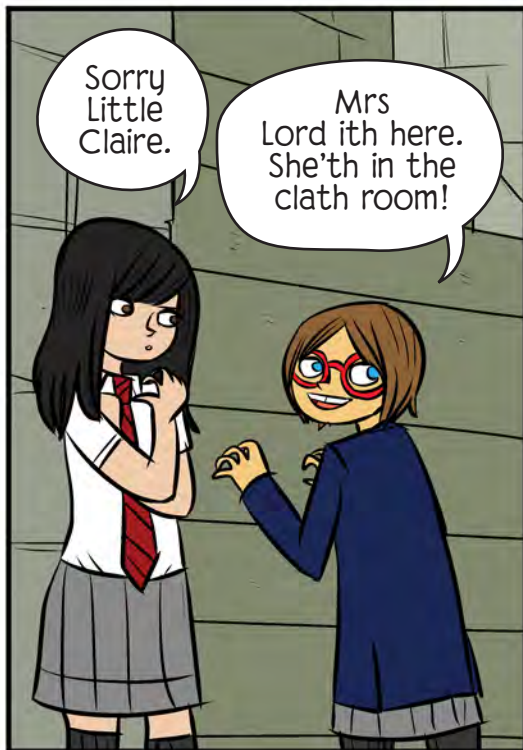
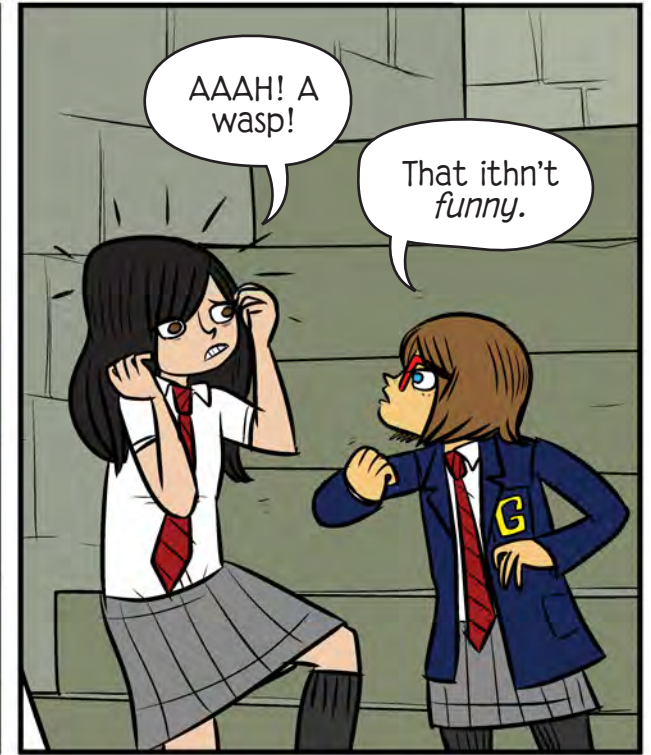
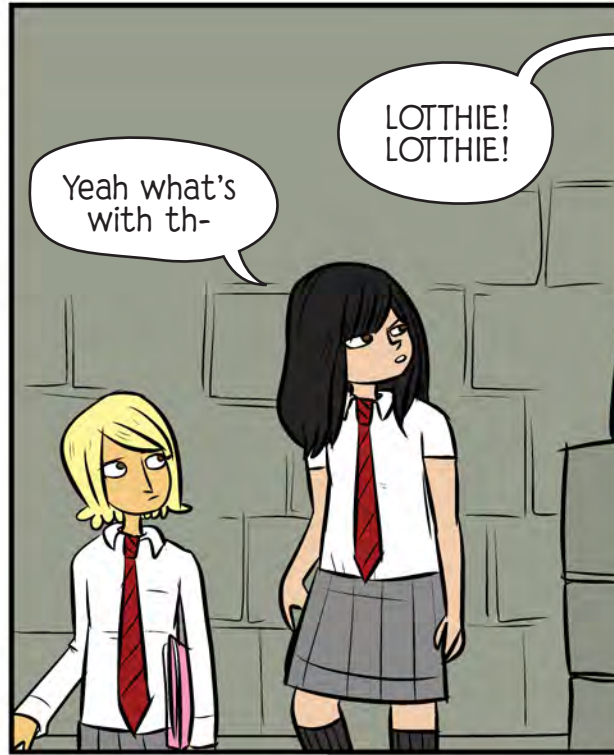
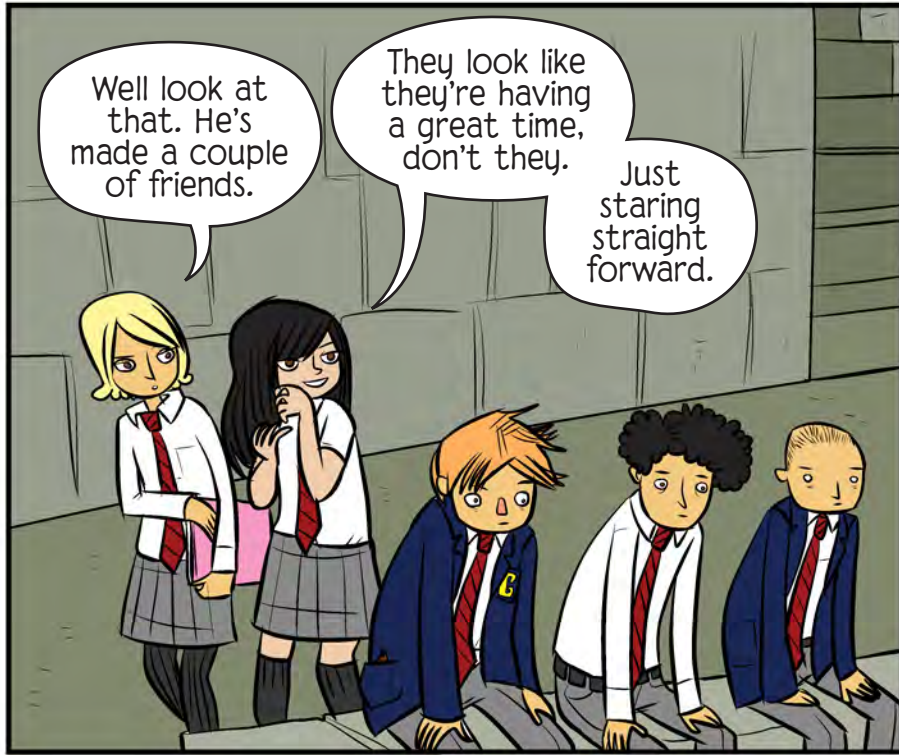
Er no thanks, uh-

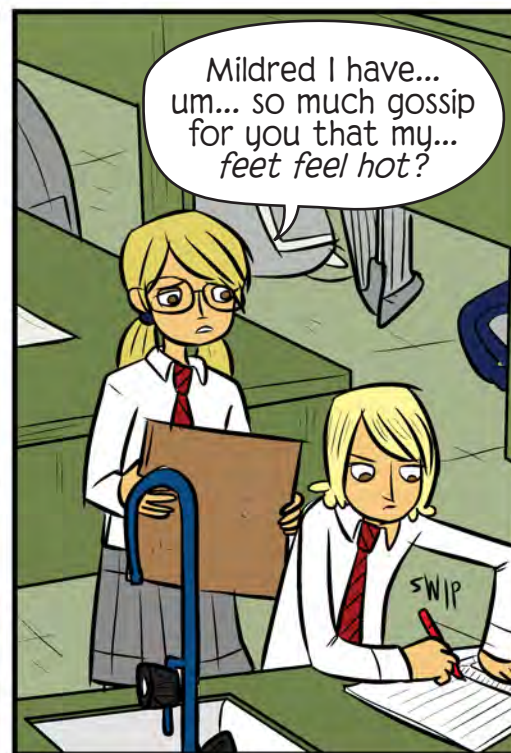
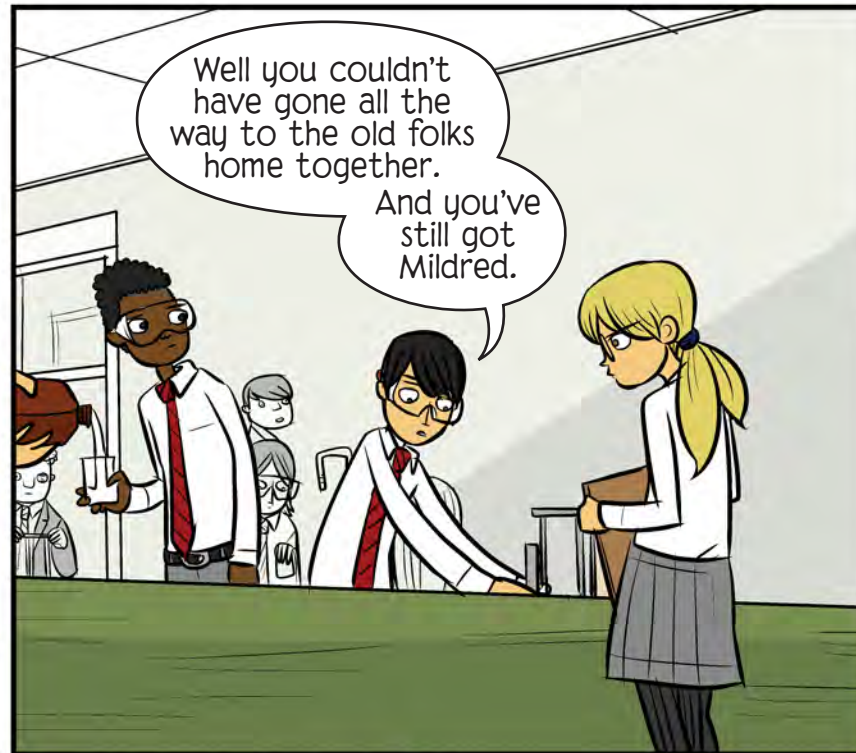
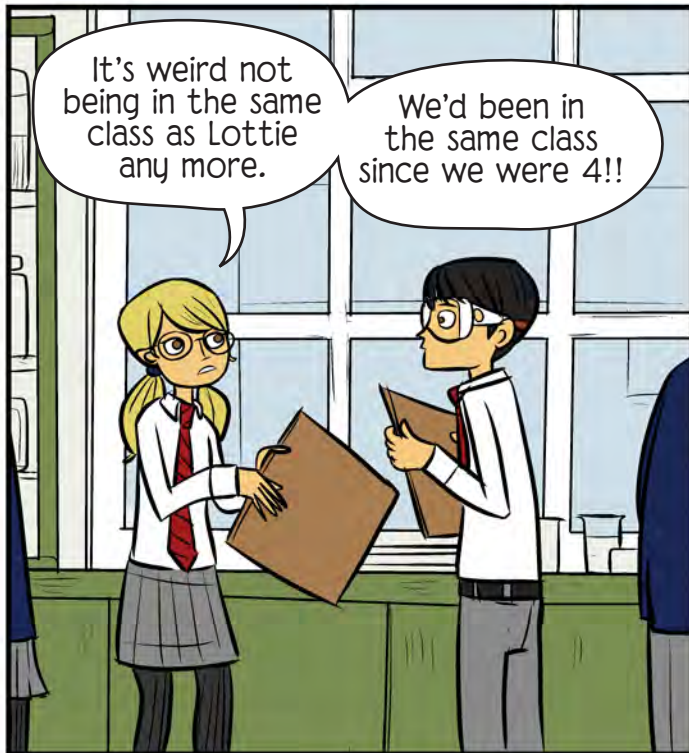


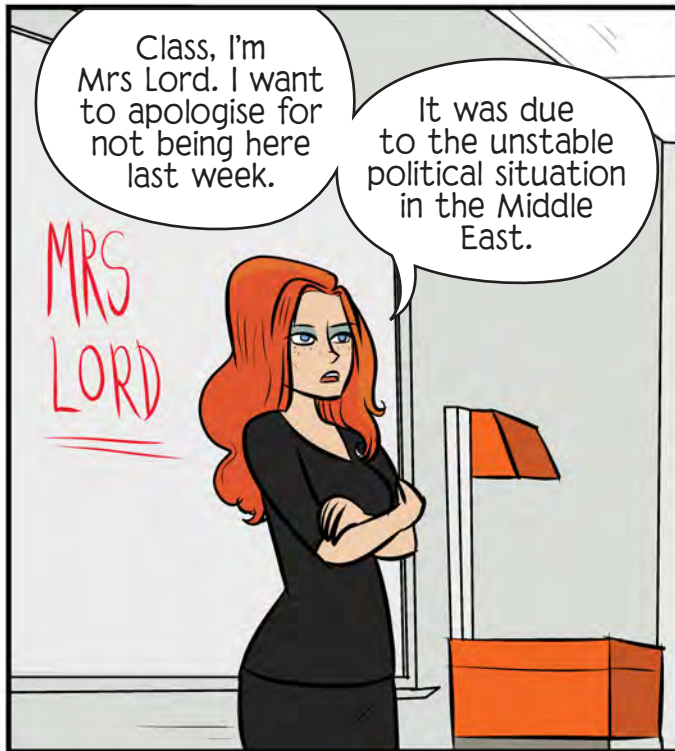
CRUNCH





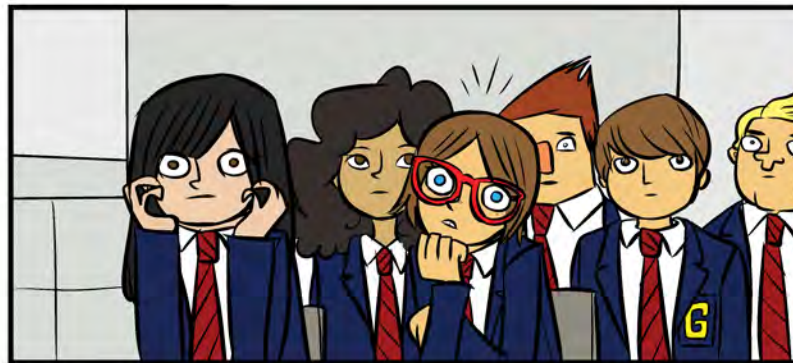






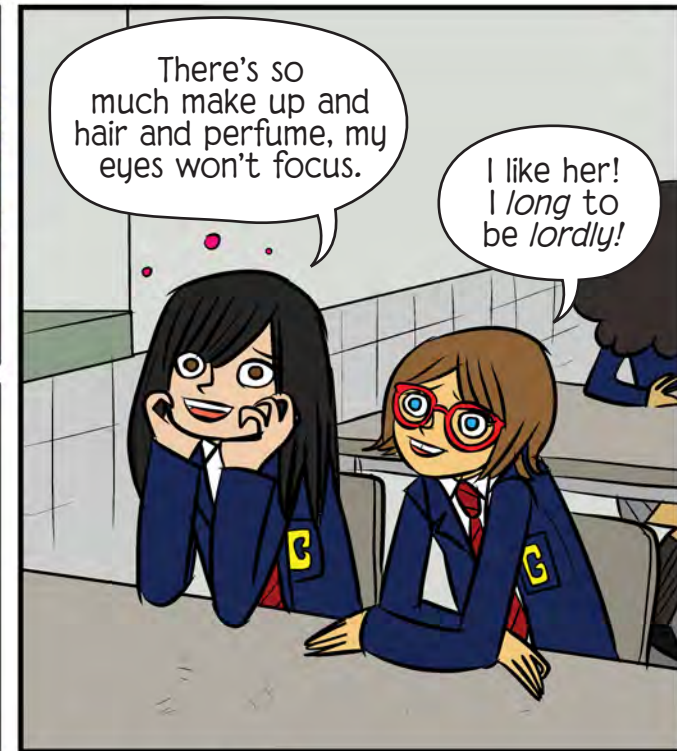
Class, I'm Mrs Lord. I want to apologise for not being here last week.

It was due to the unstable political situation in the Middle East.



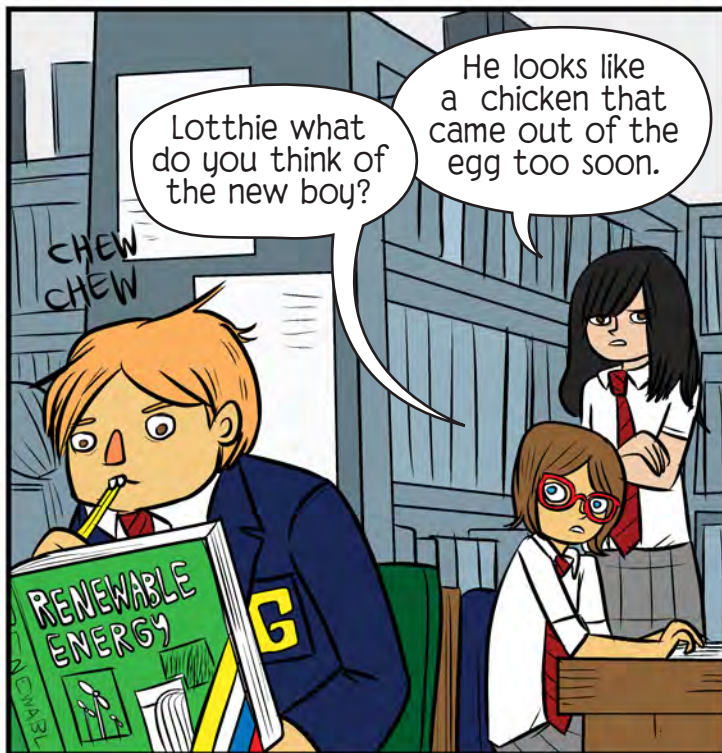
I took care of it.

HELLO 1971.



There's so much make up and hair and perfume, my eyes won't focus.

I like her! I long to be lordly!



Lotthie what do you think of the new boy?

He looks like a chicken that came out of the egg too soon.



And he stinks of ONIONS.

Yeth! Thomeone should tell him.

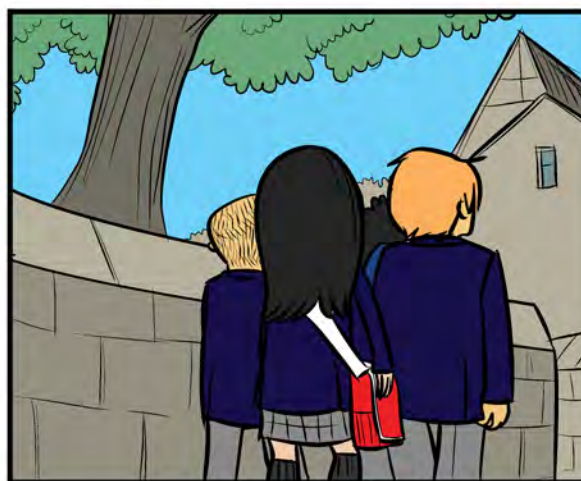
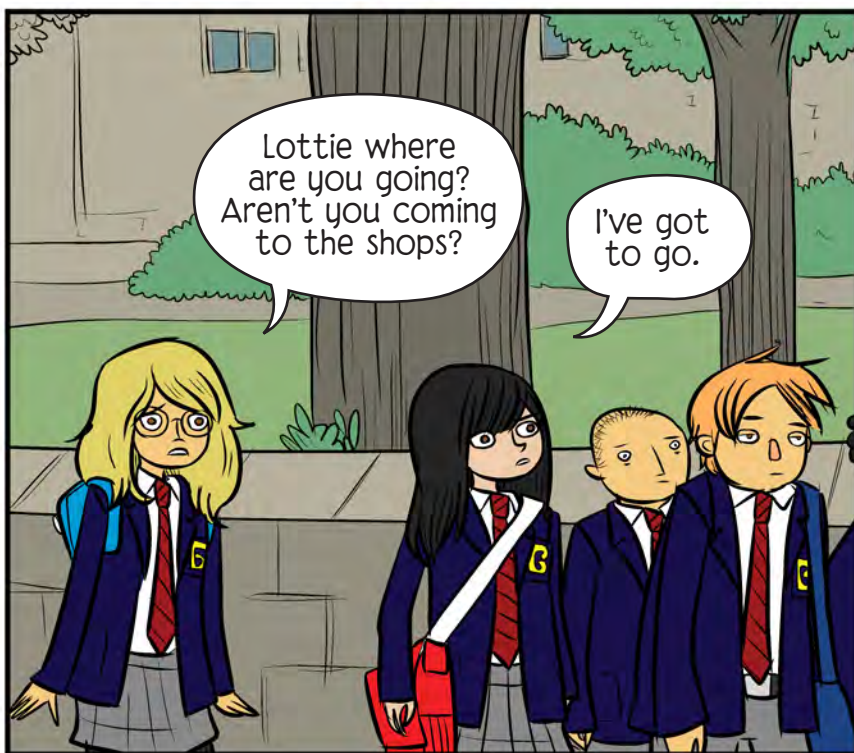
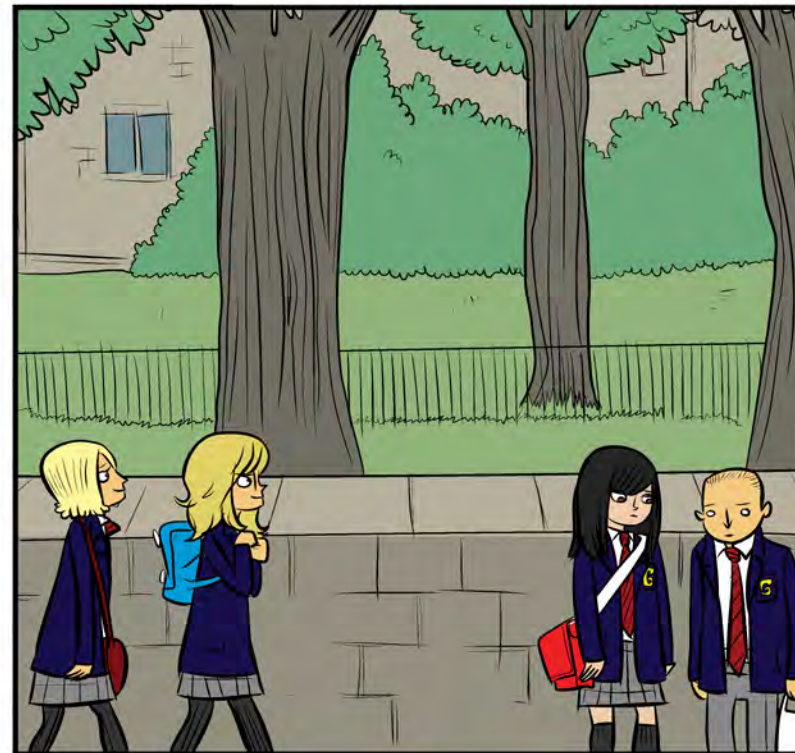
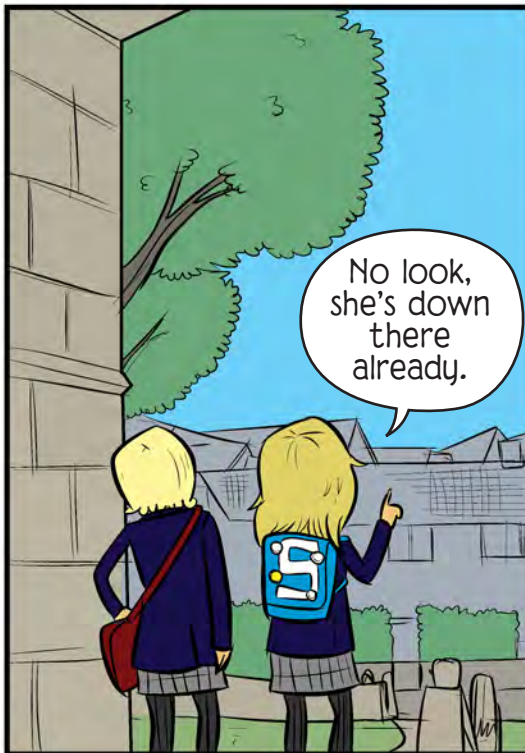
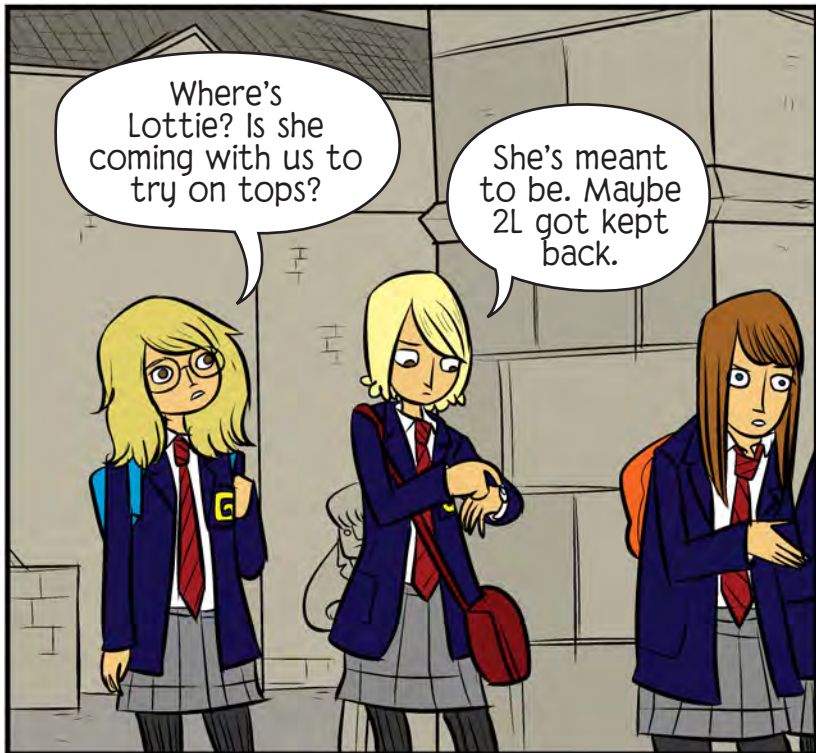


Paper rock thissors to dethide who.

Fetch the magnifying glass then, Little Claire.



I've well got no clue what those dainty little hands are up to.

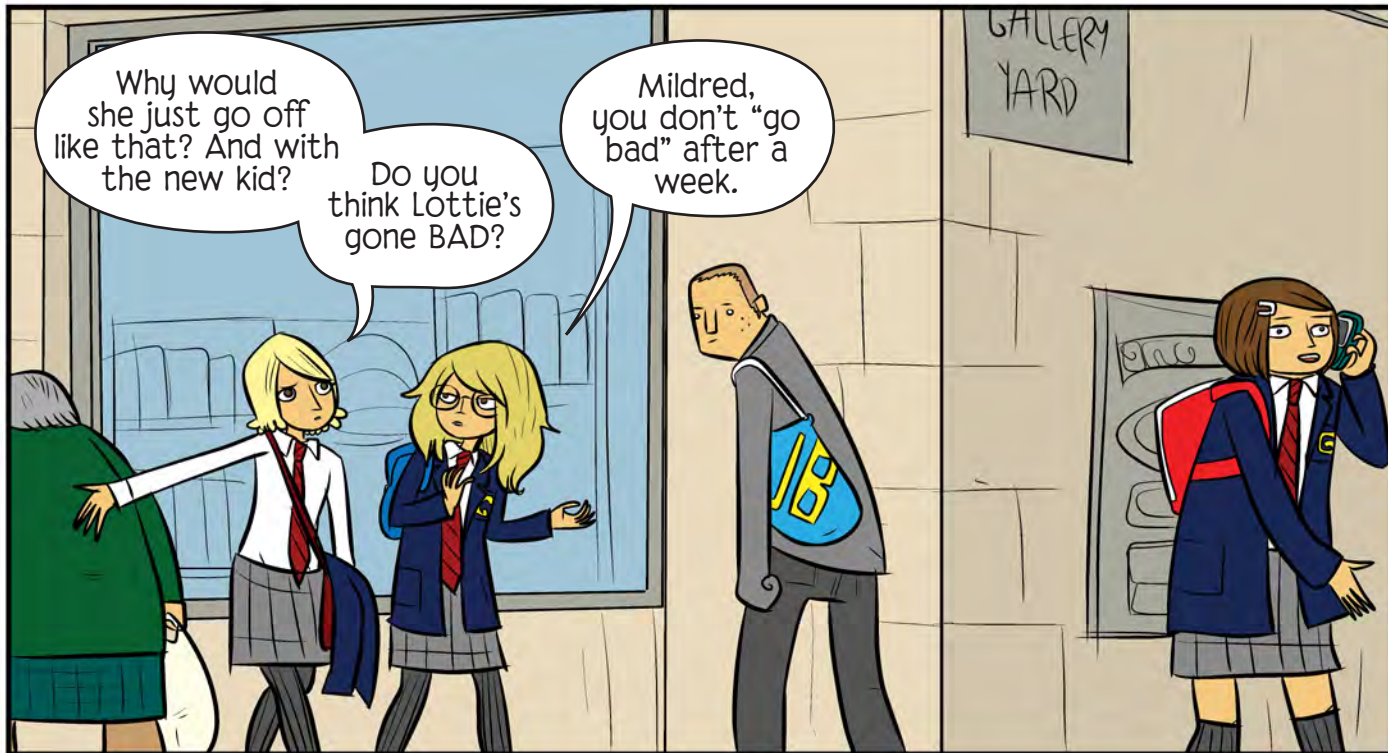




Has Lottie got a hobby we don't know about?

There's not much we don't know concernin' Lottie.

On account of her MOUTH.

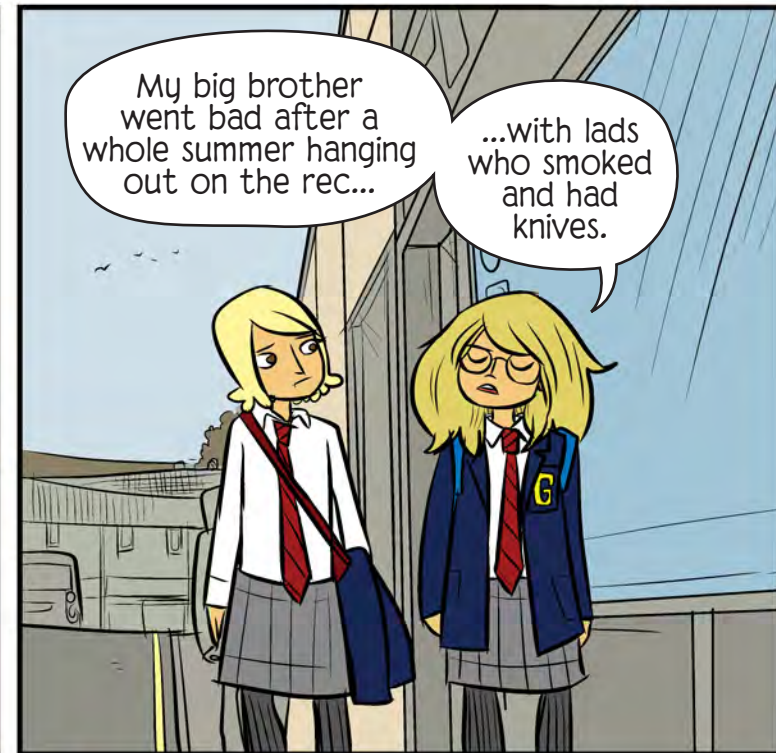


Why would she just go off like that? And with the new kid?

Do you think Lottie's gone BAD?

Mildred, you don't "go bad" after a week.

GALLERY YARD



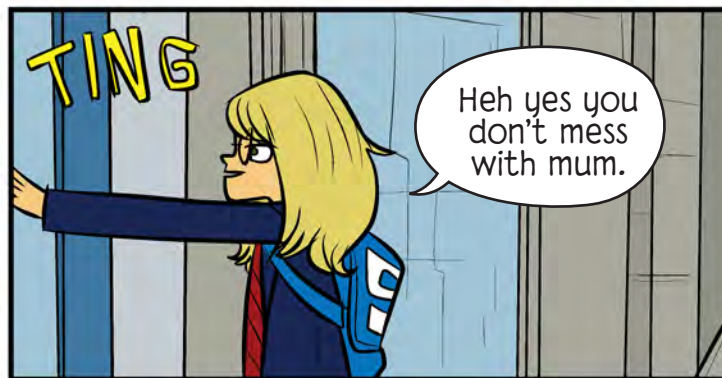
My big brother went bad after a whole summer hanging out on the rec...

...with lads who smoked and had knives.



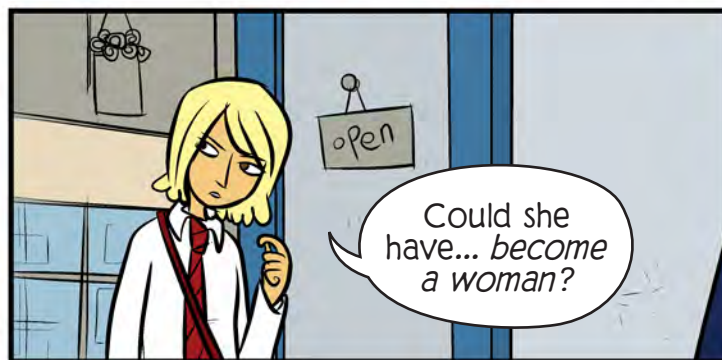
And he was only bad when he was out and about with them.

Yeah, I bet your Mum would have given him a clout.



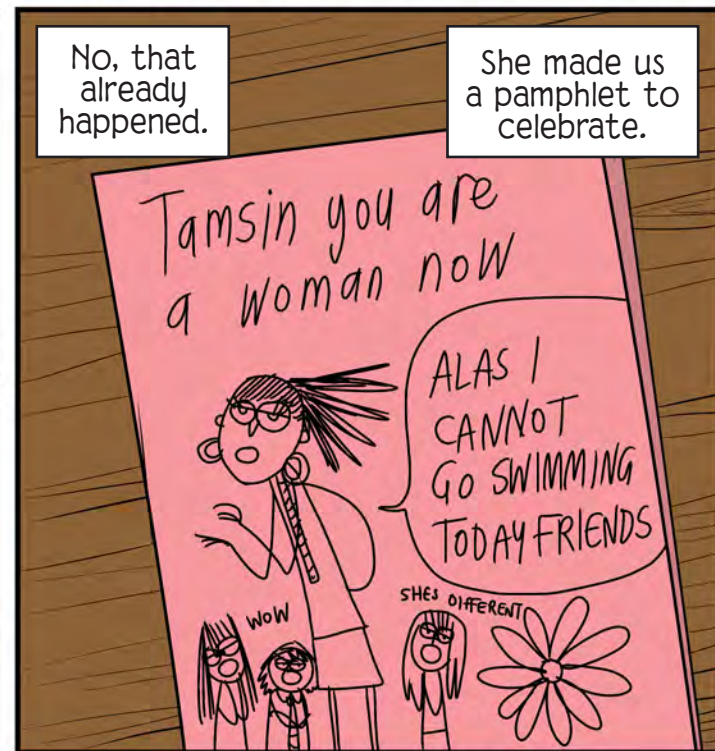
TING

Heh yes you don't mess with mum.



open

Could she have... become a woman?



No, that already happened.

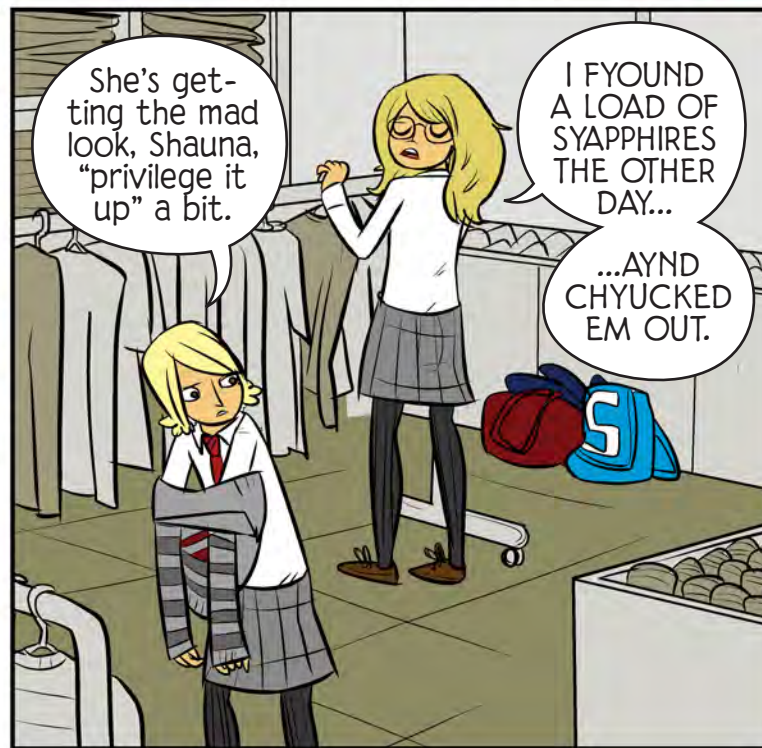
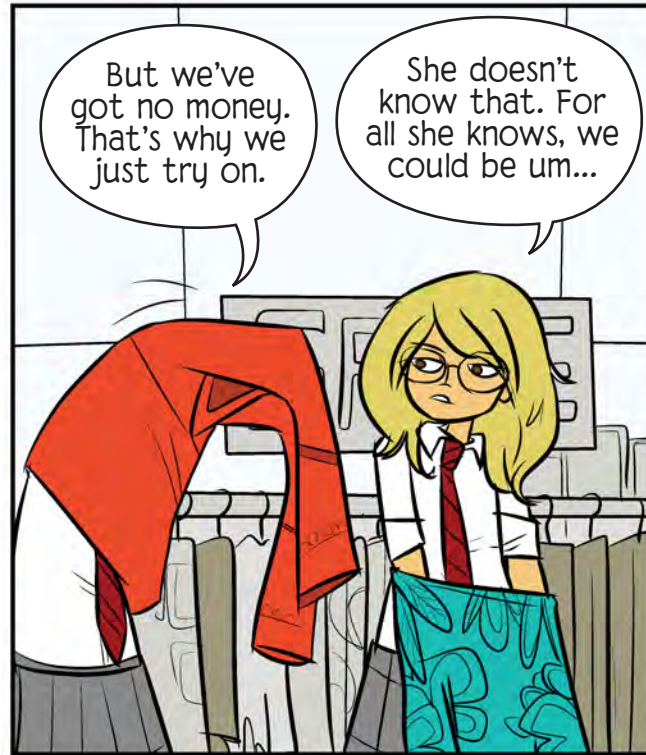
She made us a pamphlet to celebrate.

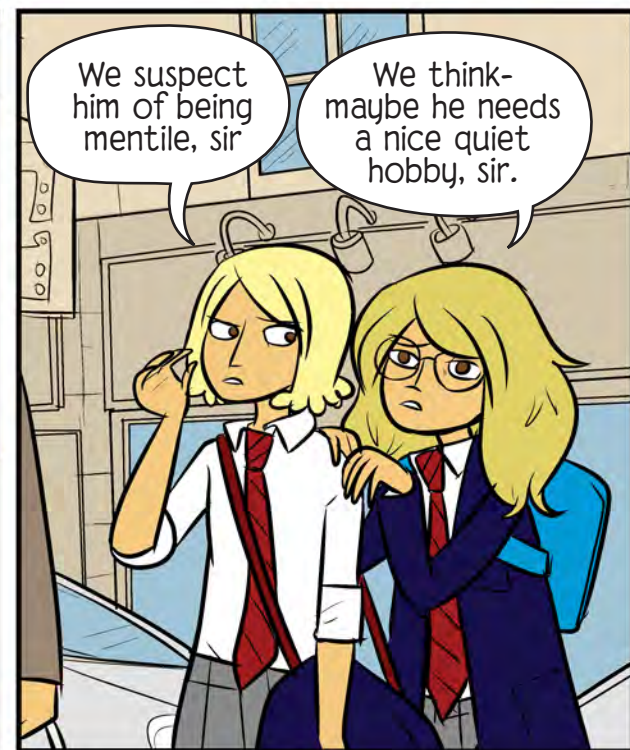
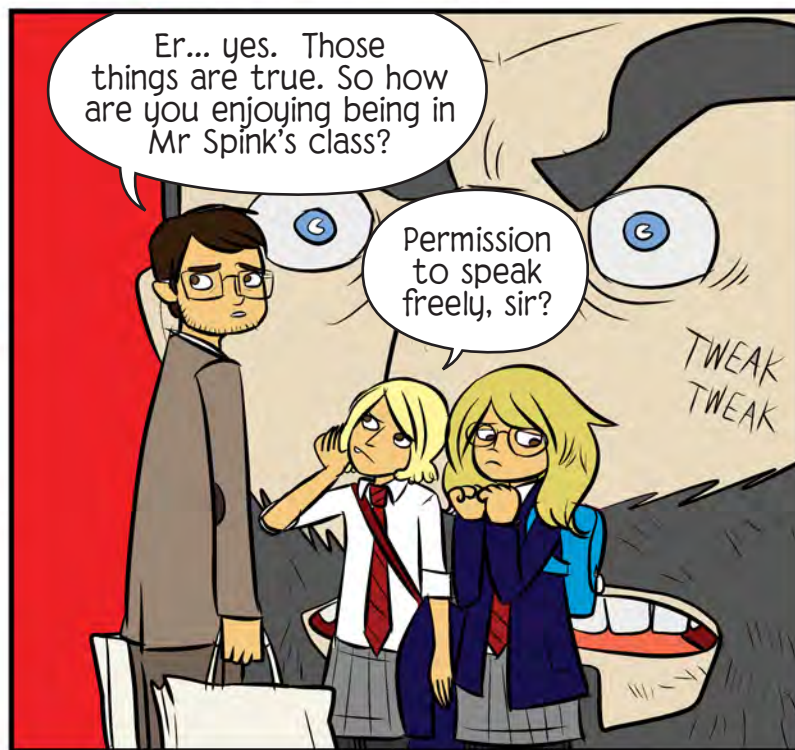
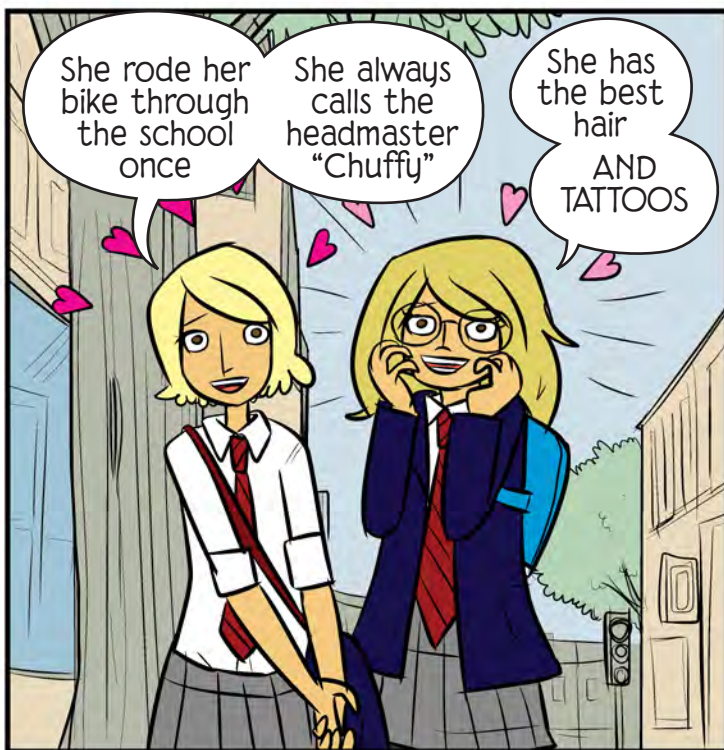
Tamsin you are a woman now

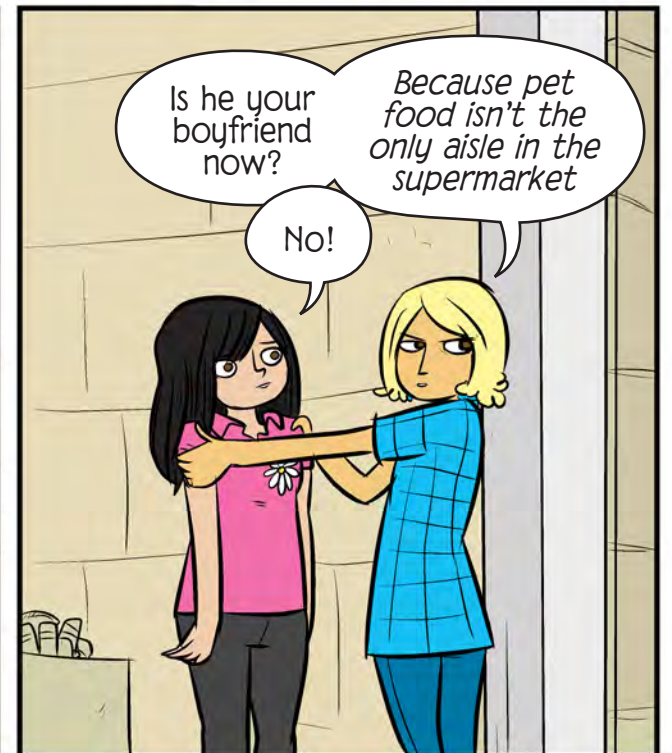
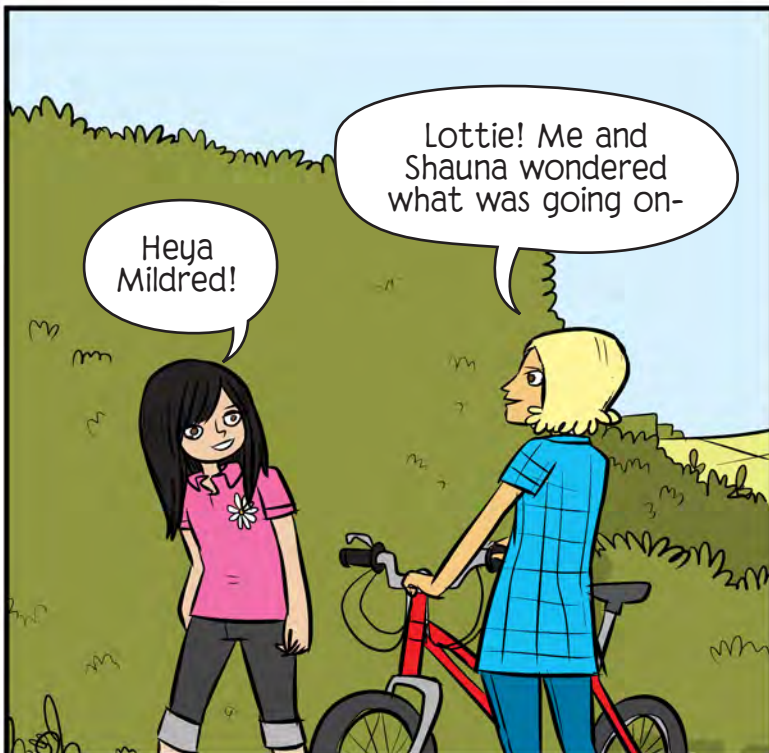
ALAS I CANNOT GO SWIMMING TODAY FRIENDS

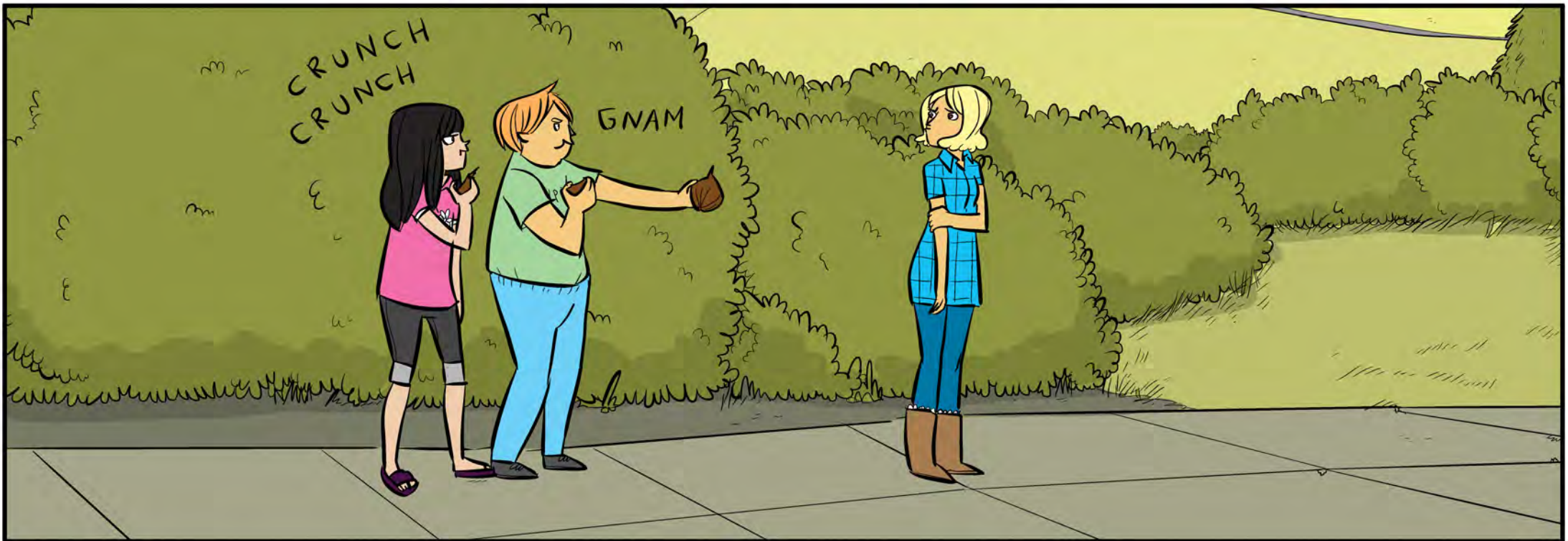
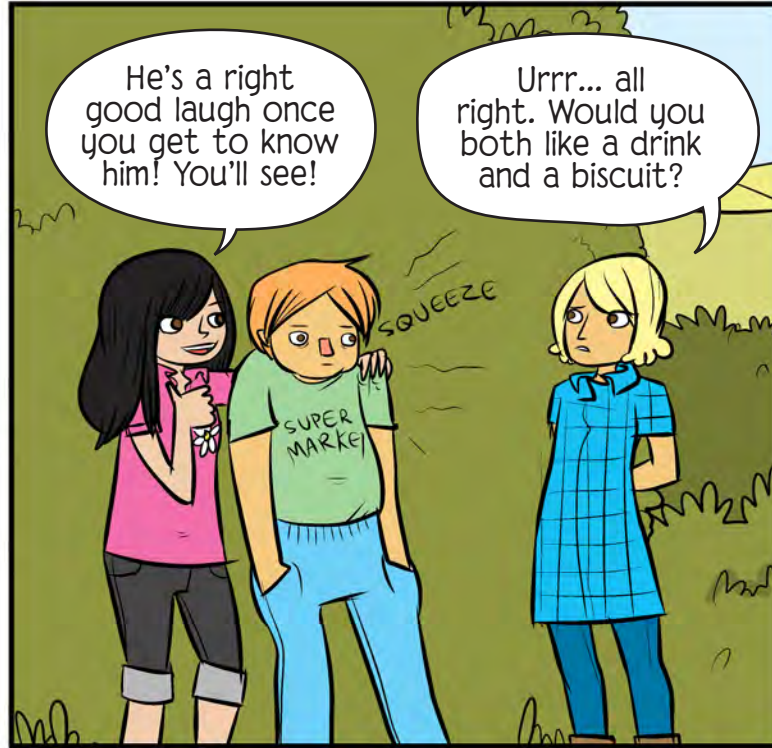
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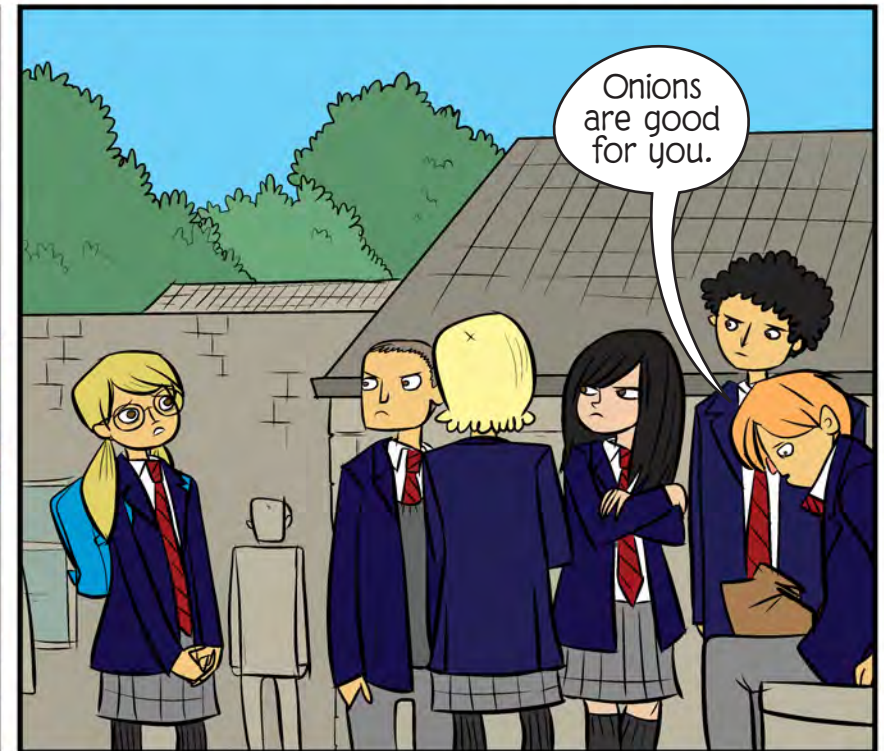
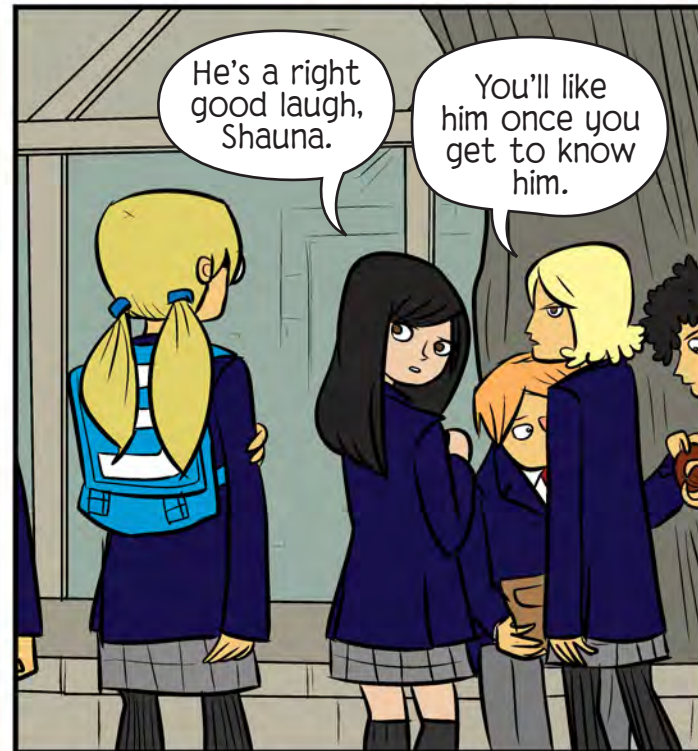
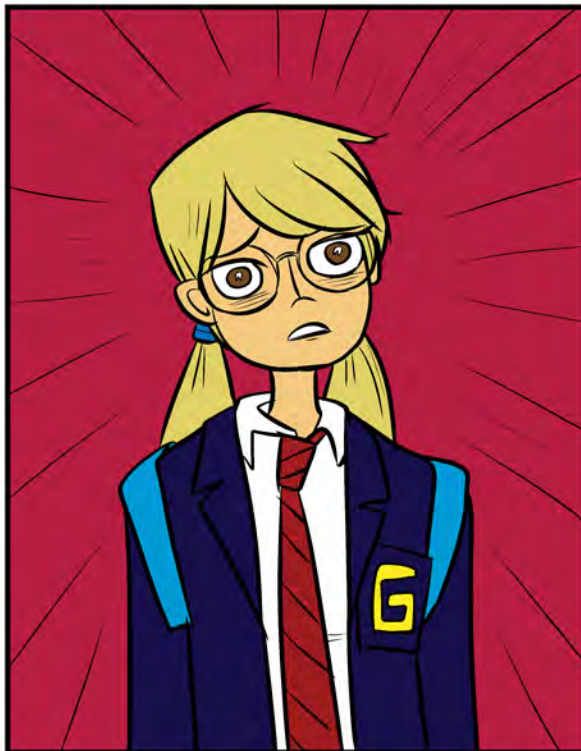
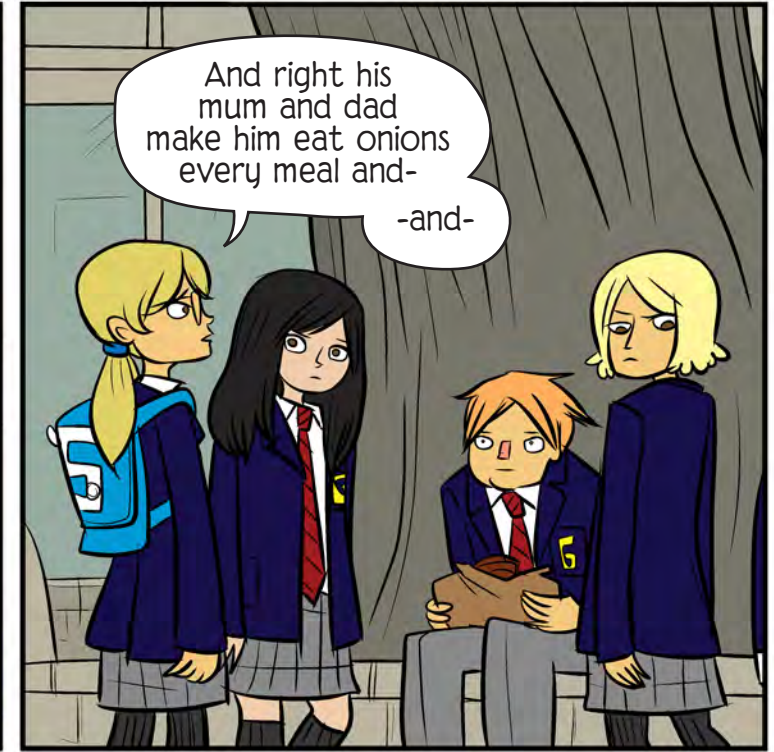
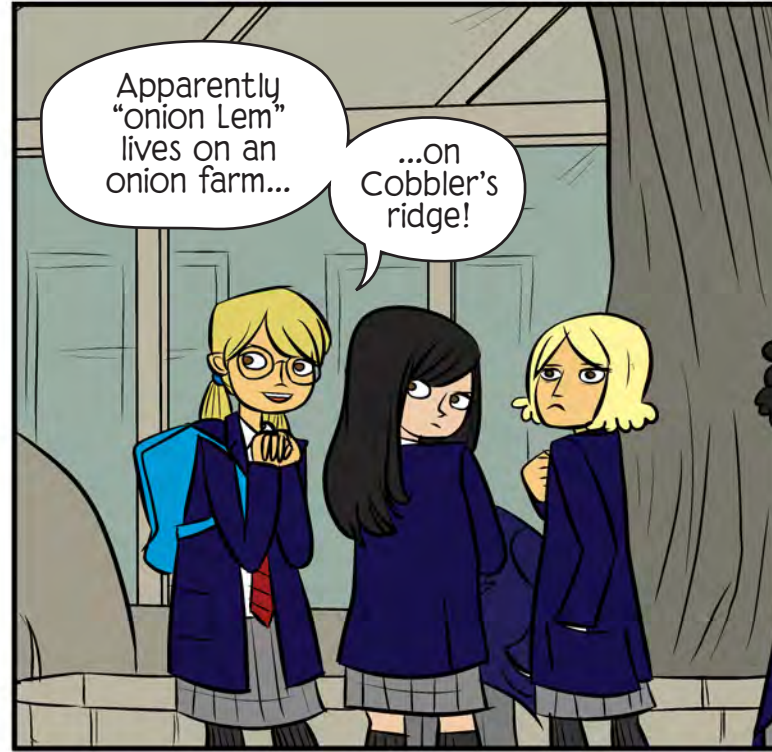
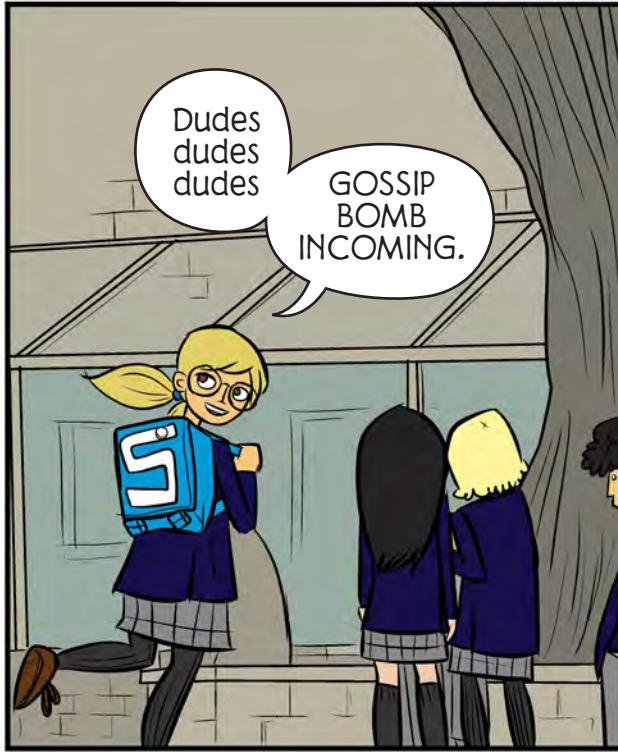
SHE'S DIFFERENT

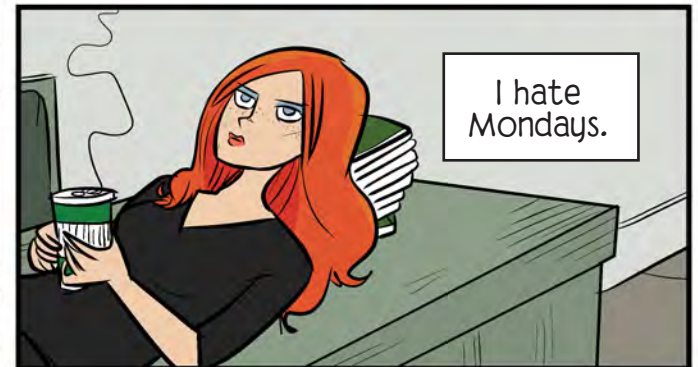
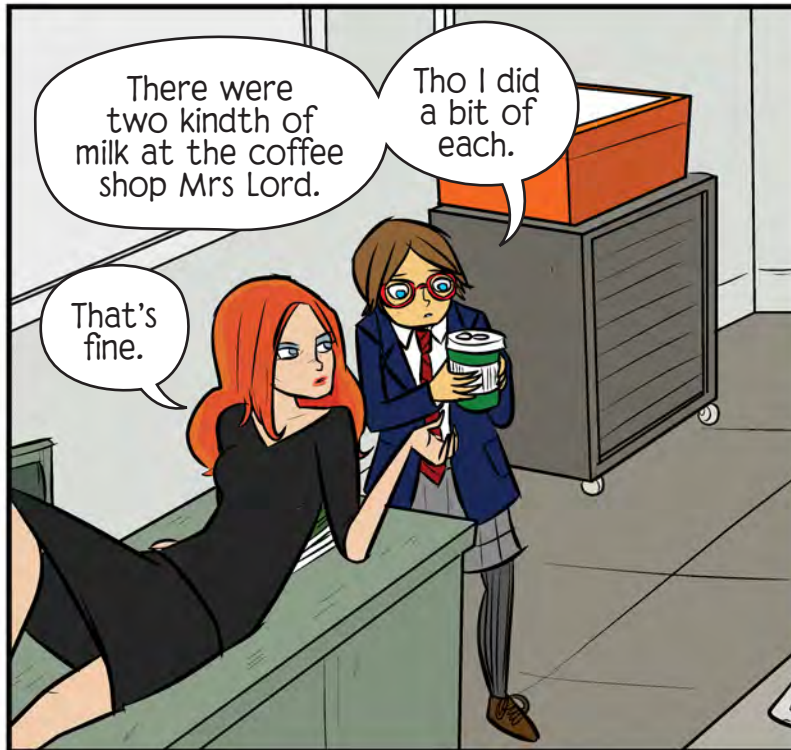
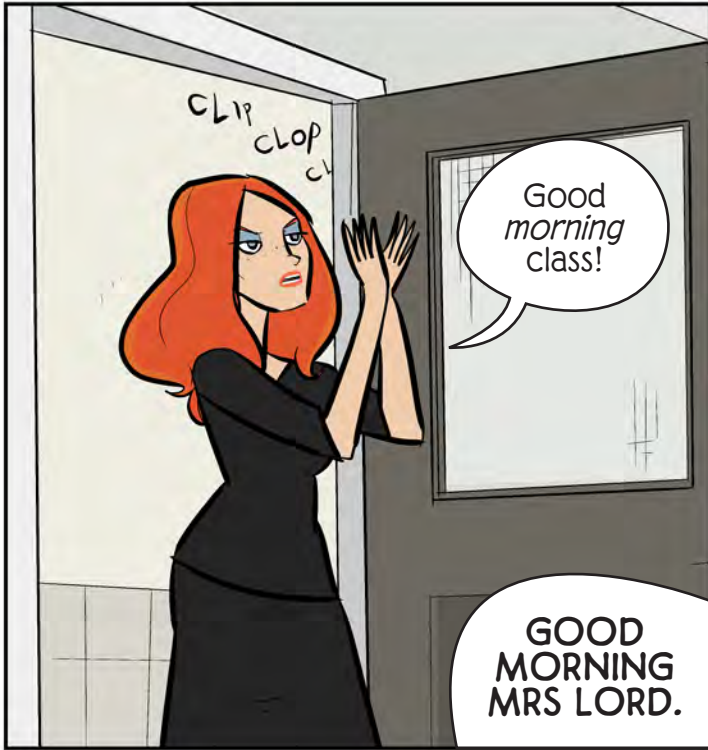


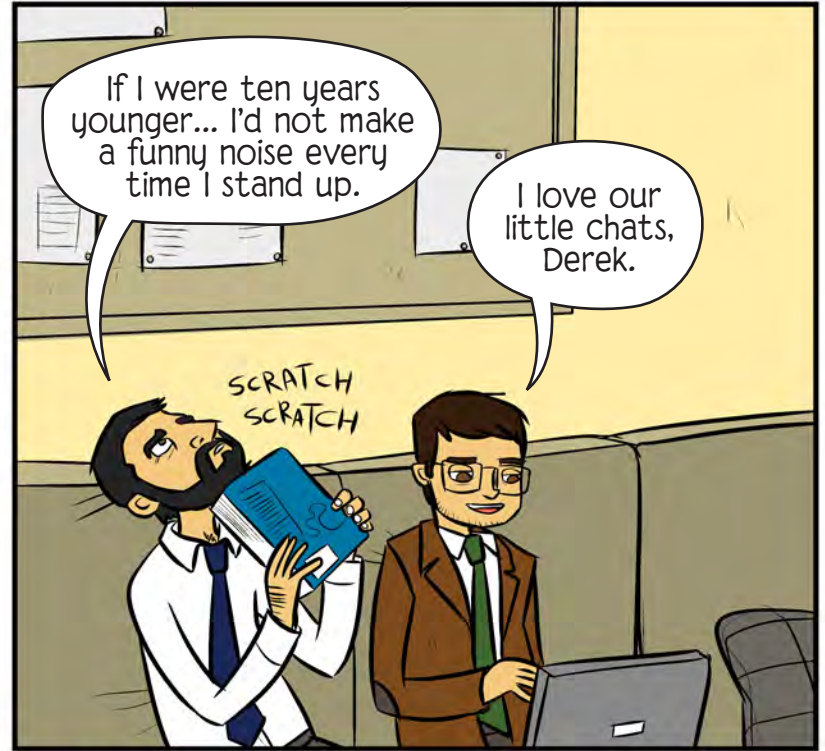
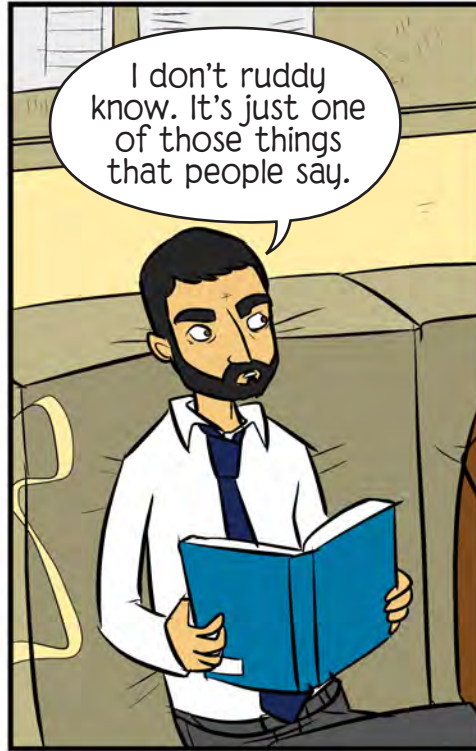


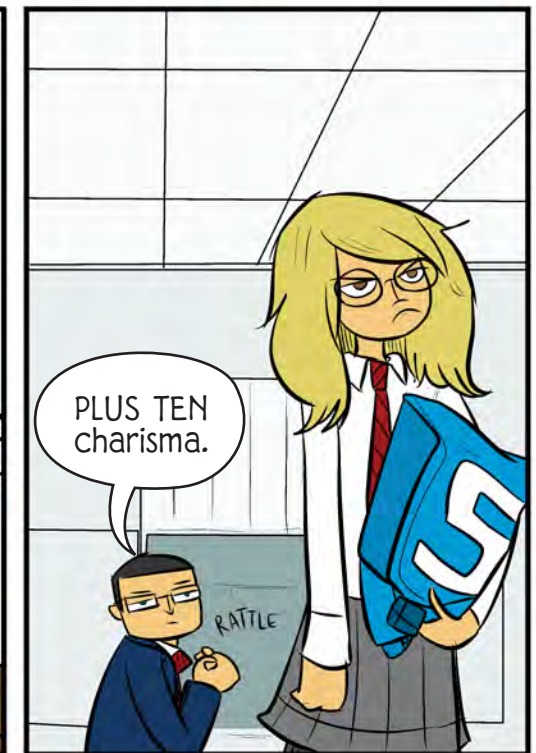
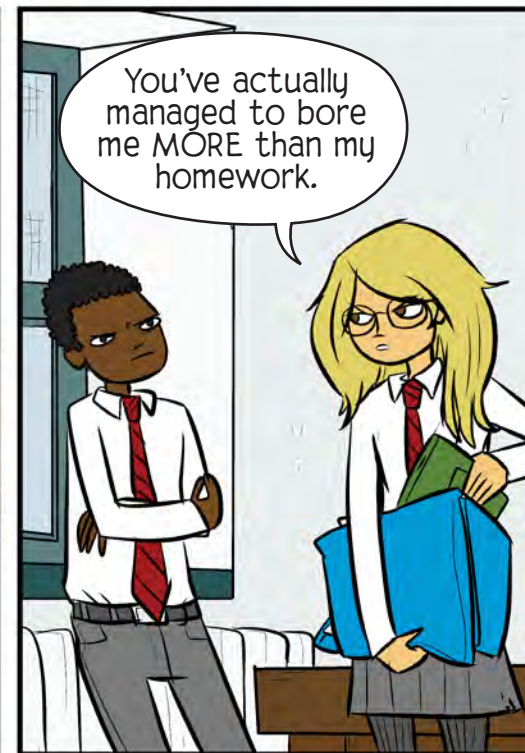
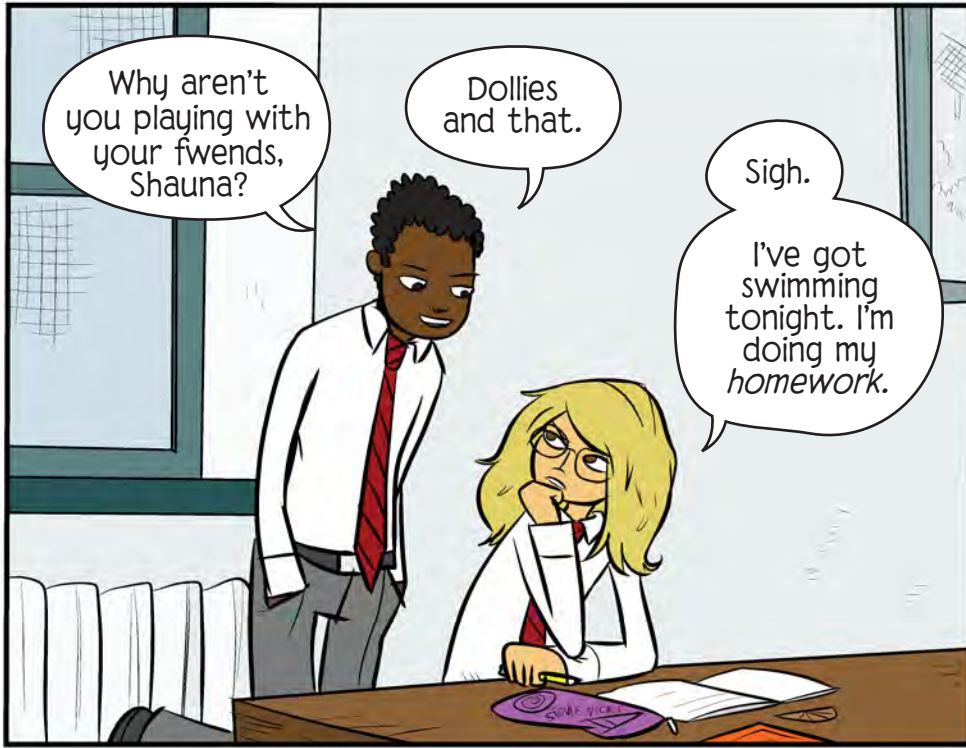


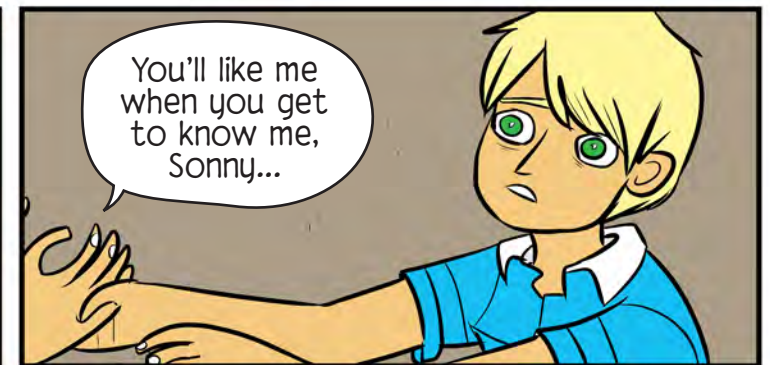






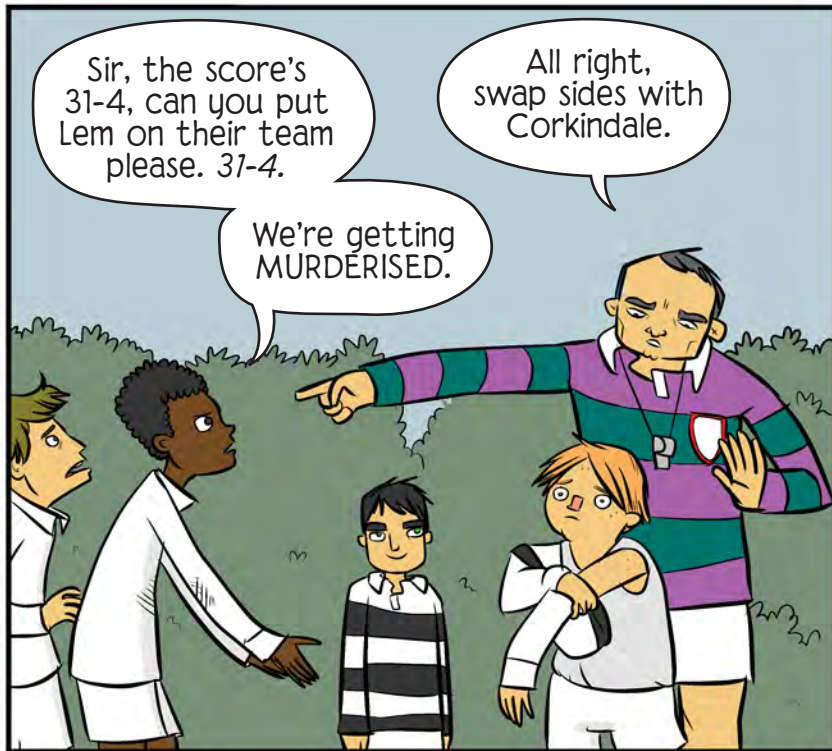








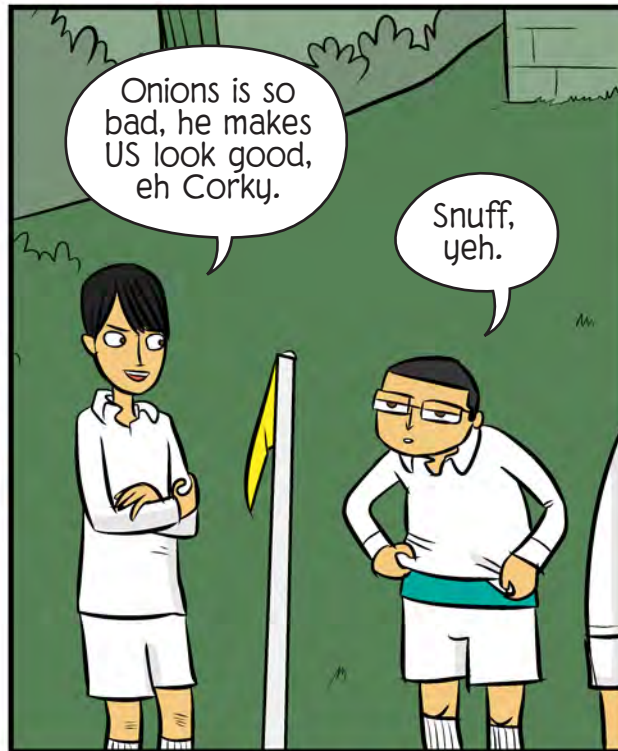




Sir, the score's 31-4, can you put Lem on their team please. 37-4.

All right, swap sides with Corkindale.

We're getting MURDERISED.



Onions is so bad, he makes US look good, eh Corky.

Snuff, yeh.



How come you're doing games now?

I thought you had a "rolling sick note".

New family doctor.



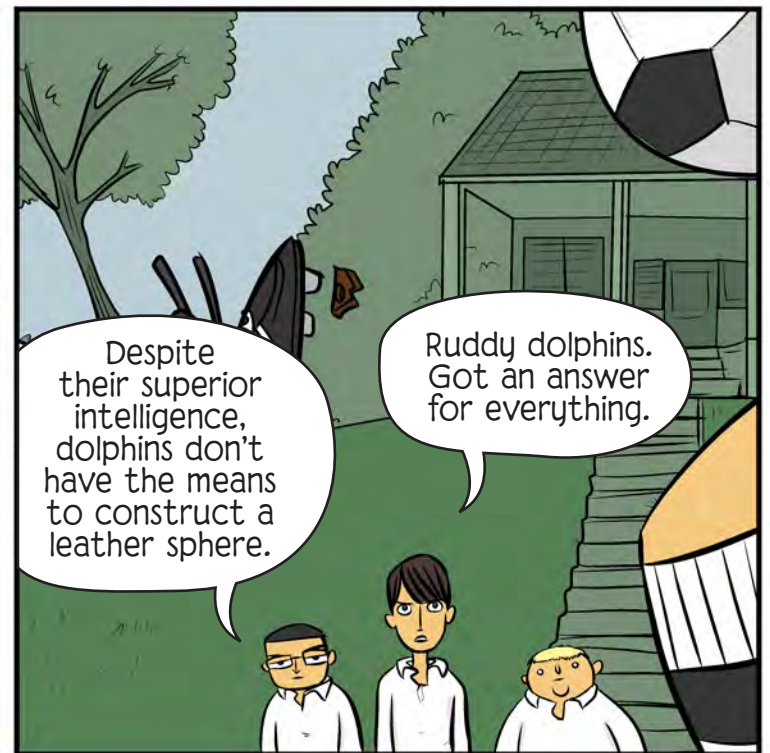
First thing he does is ask me what football team I support.

You knew the good times were over, huh.



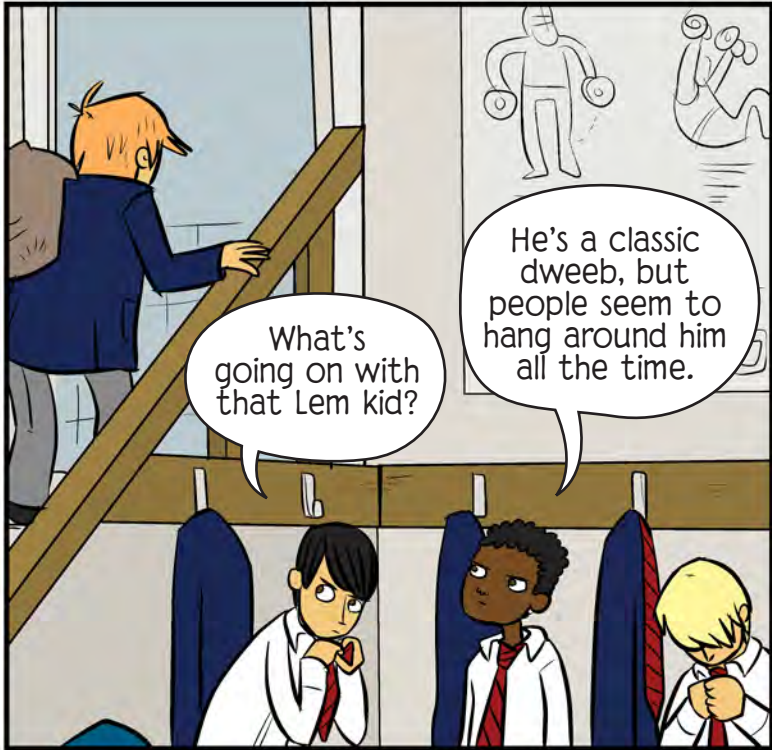
"Sport will do your weak chest good".

If exercise is so good for you, why do you never see DOLPHINS playing footer?



Despite their superior intelligence, dolphins don't have the means to construct a leather sphere.

Ruddy dolphins. Got an answer for everything.



What's going on with that Lem kid?

He's a classic dweeb, but people seem to hang around him all the time.



Even Lottie and Mildred. It's *creepy*.

This feels like a MYSTERY!

Yes!

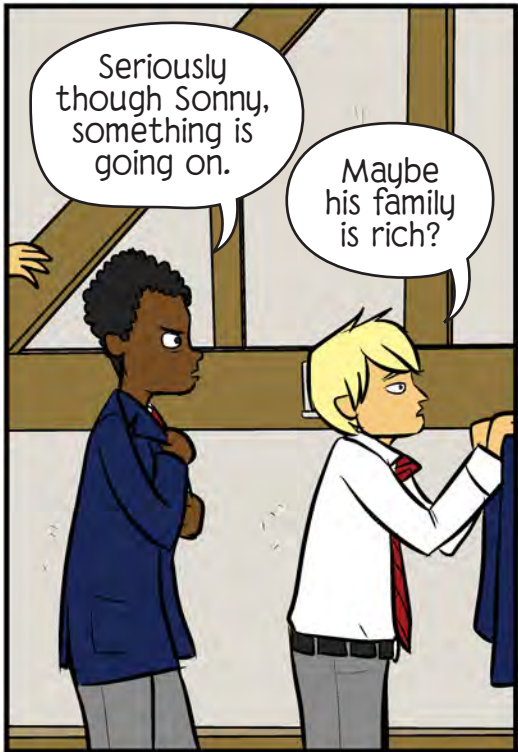


He's a right good laugh once you get to know him.



HA HA HA! That's exactly how they all say it!

Oh god, that's perfect.



Seriously though Sonny, something is going on.

Maybe his family is rich?



That doesn't explain why people have started eating raw onions like he does.

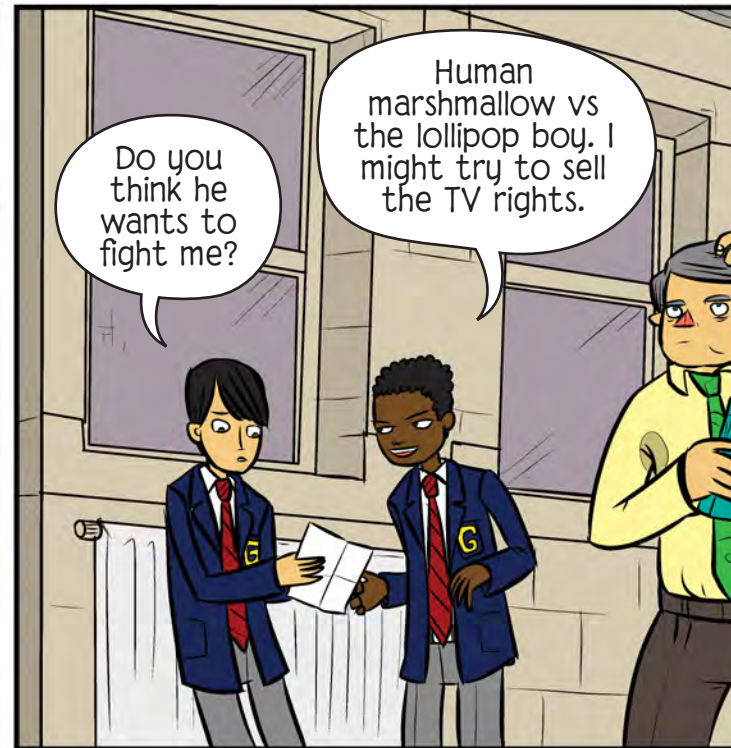
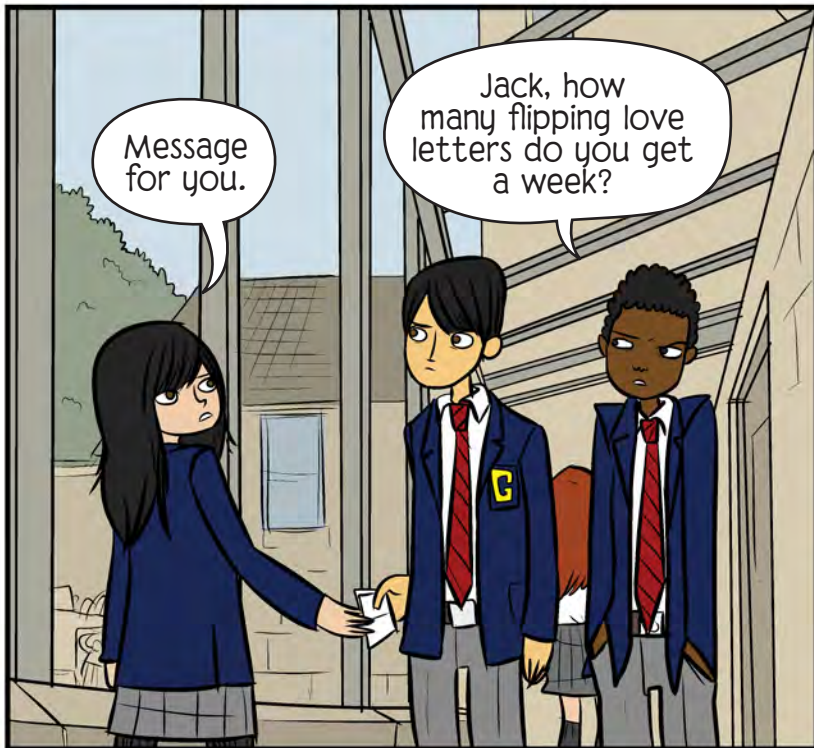
We'll get to the bottom of this boys.

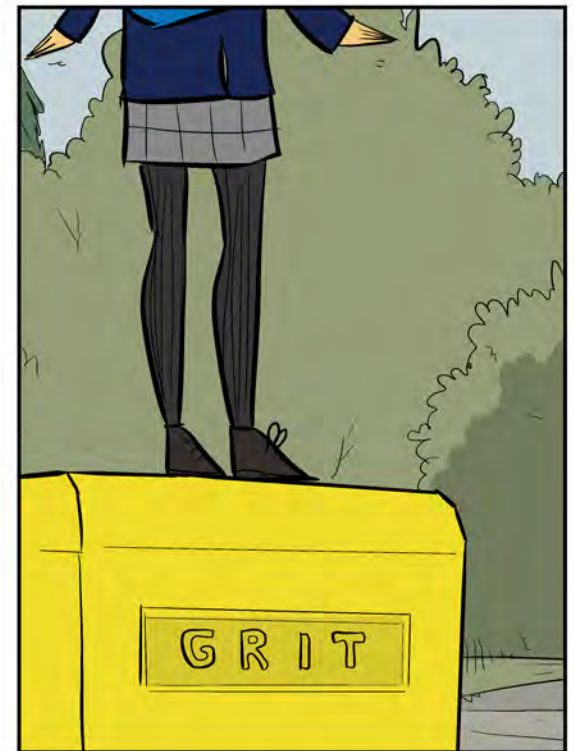
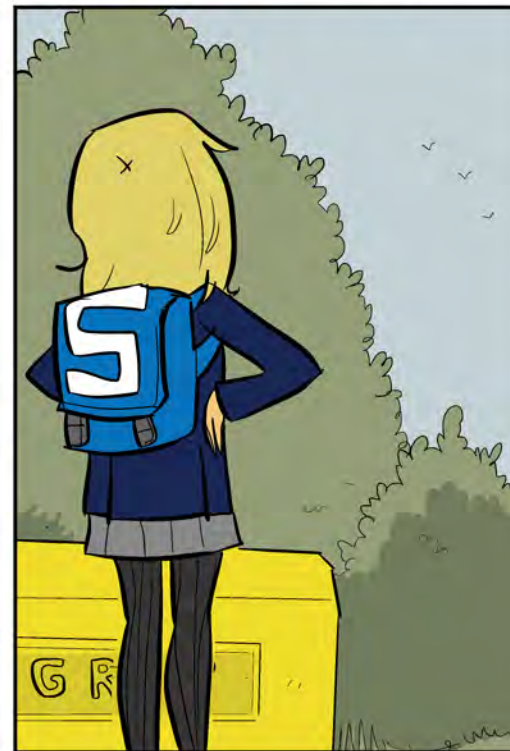
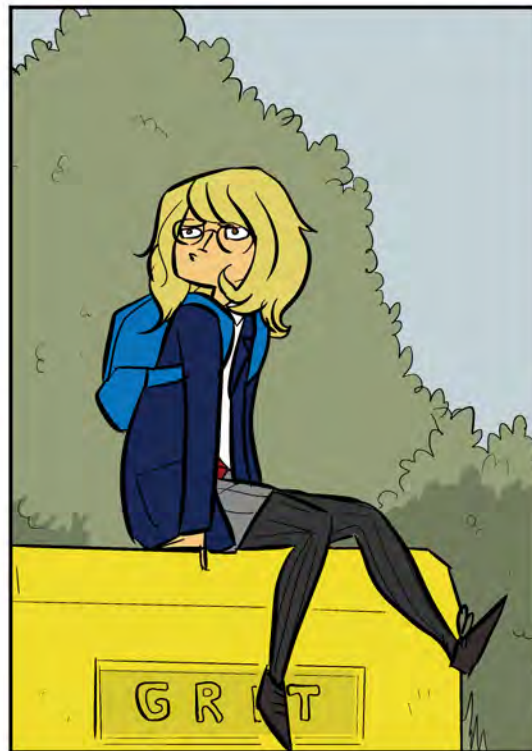
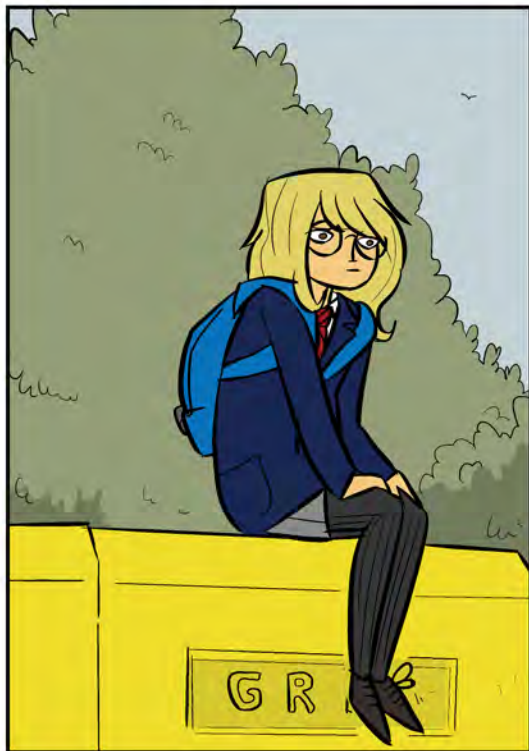
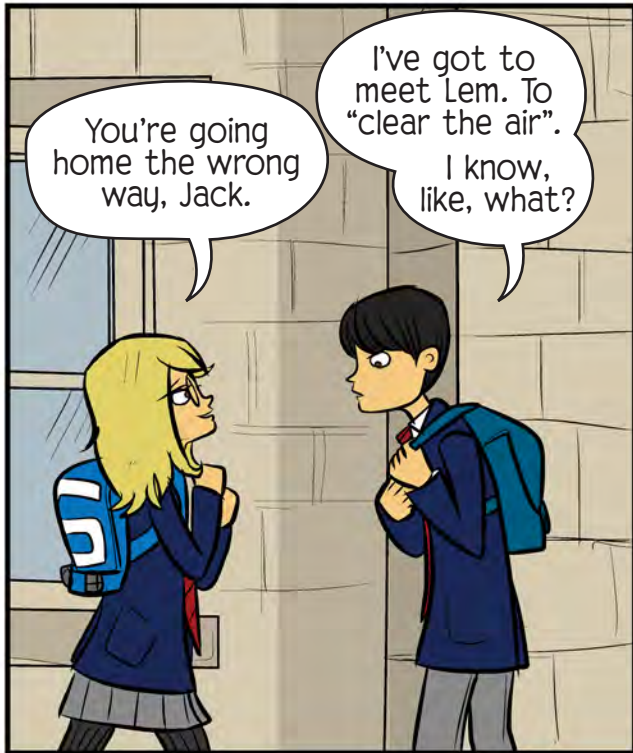


Before his onion-crazy disciples fart the roof off the school.



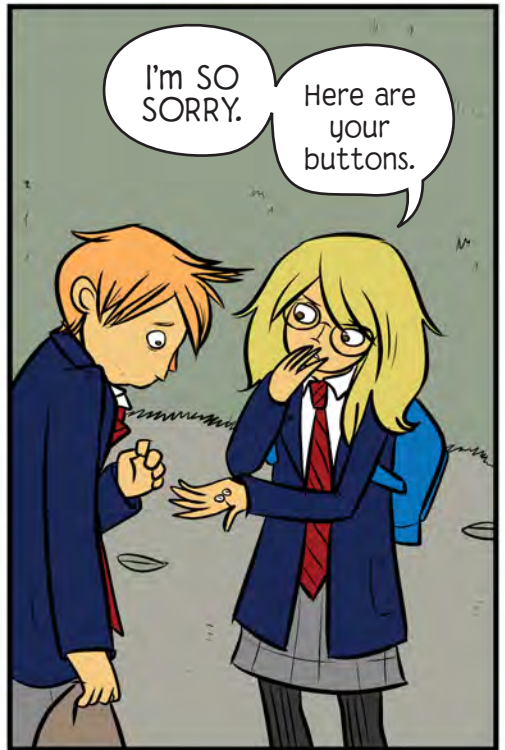
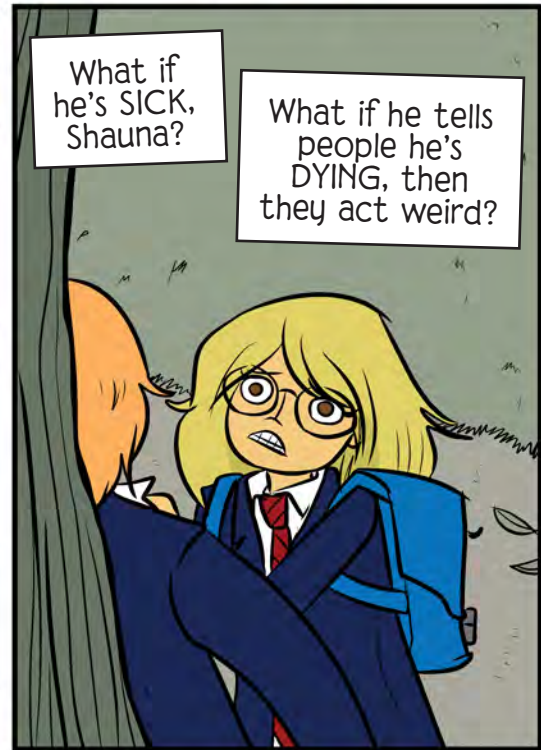
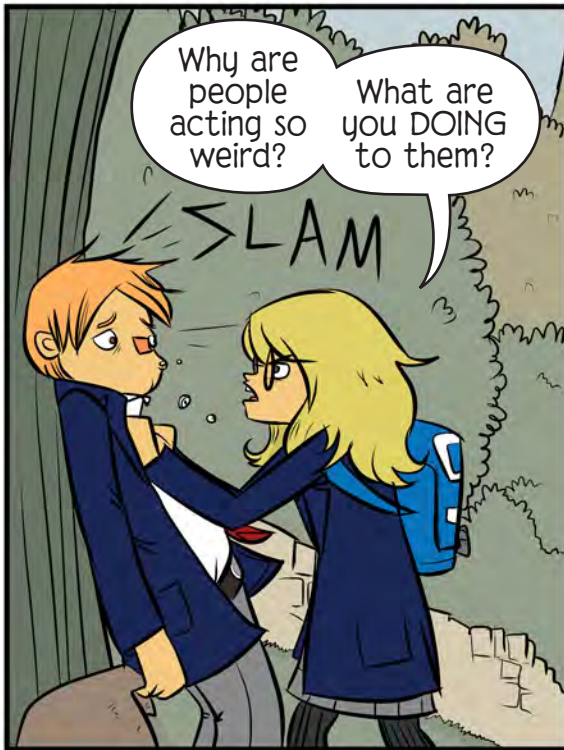
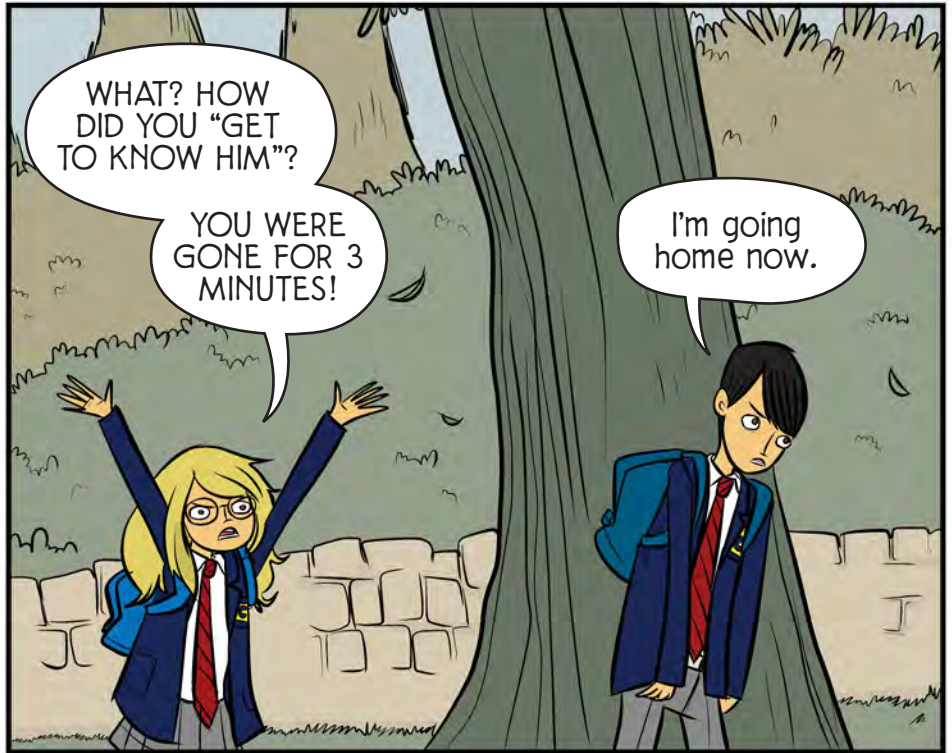
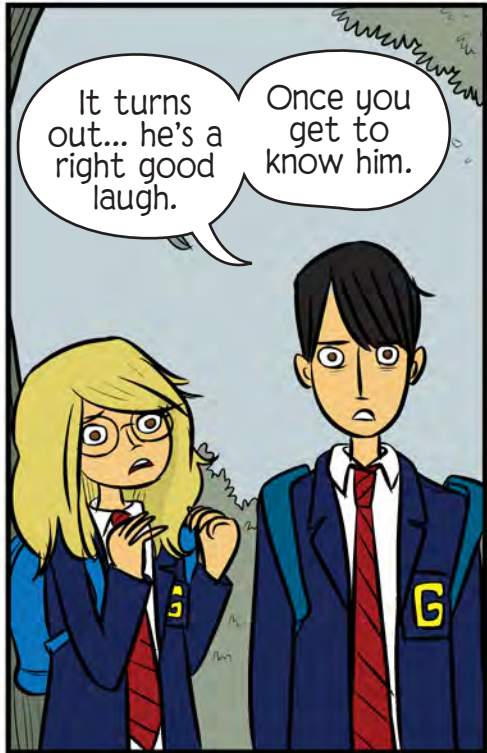
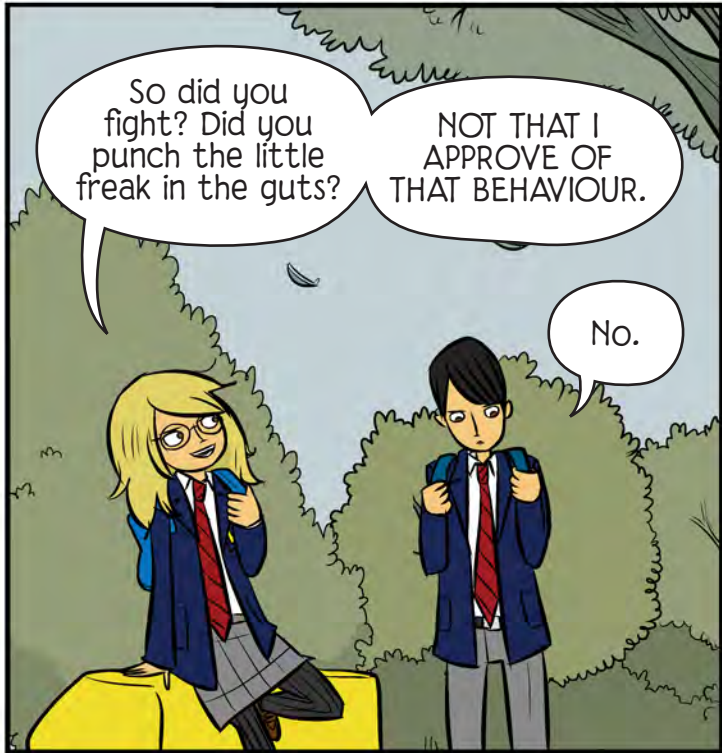
NANG MANG GRANG

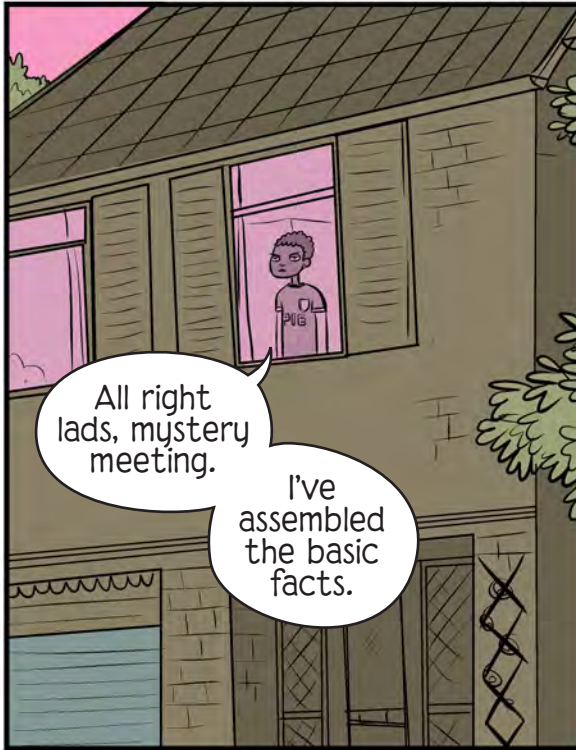




2







All right lads, mystery meeting.

I've assembled the basic facts.



Since Lem Wakefield came to school, people are hanging around him like... Jack?



"Like flies around a dog tod", Jack, come on.

This despite Lem having NO PERSONALITY.



"Lem-ites" (my own term) are dull and listless.

They begin to eat onions and claim-



HE'S A RIGHT GOOD LAUGH ONCE YOU GET TO KNOW HIM.

Y-yes!



My plan is to follow him home and observe his ways in secret.

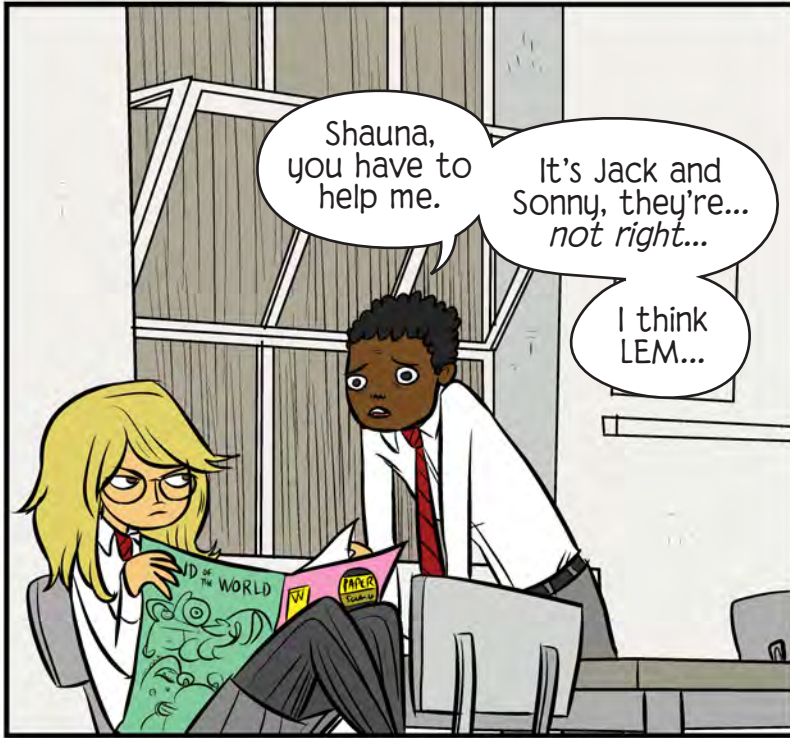
What do you think?

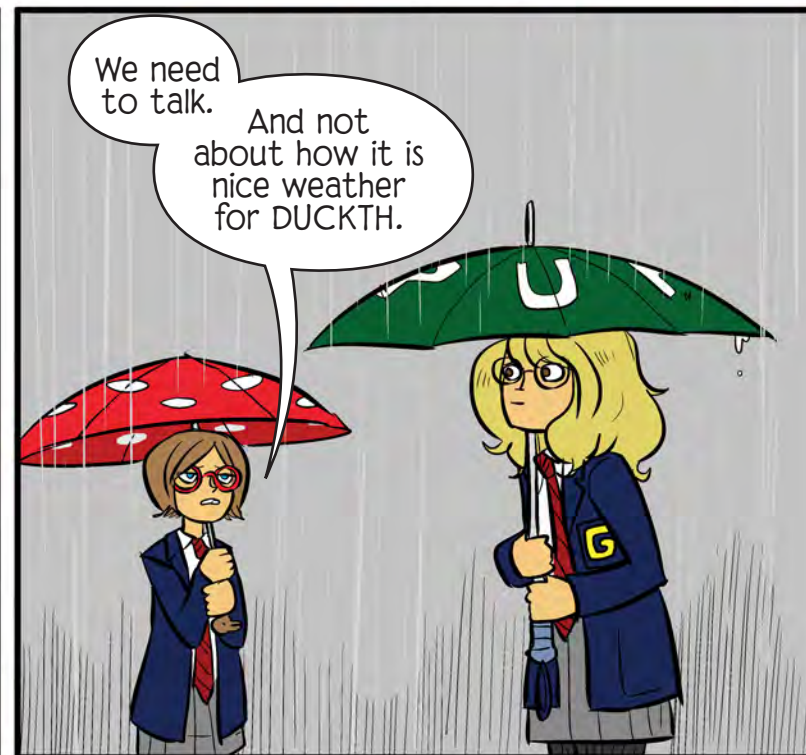
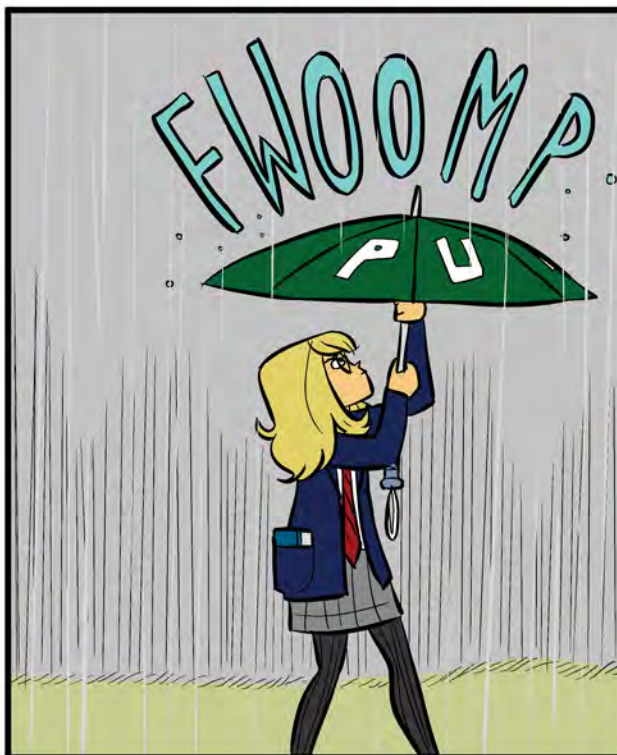
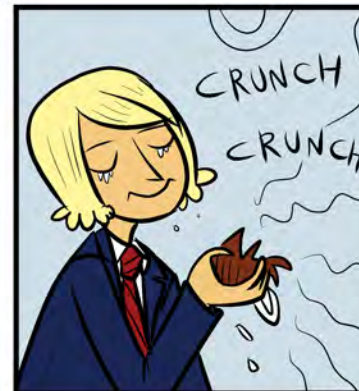
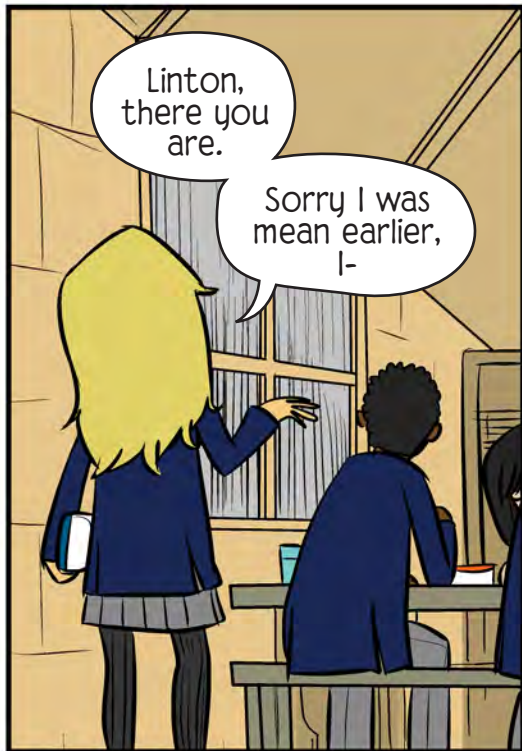


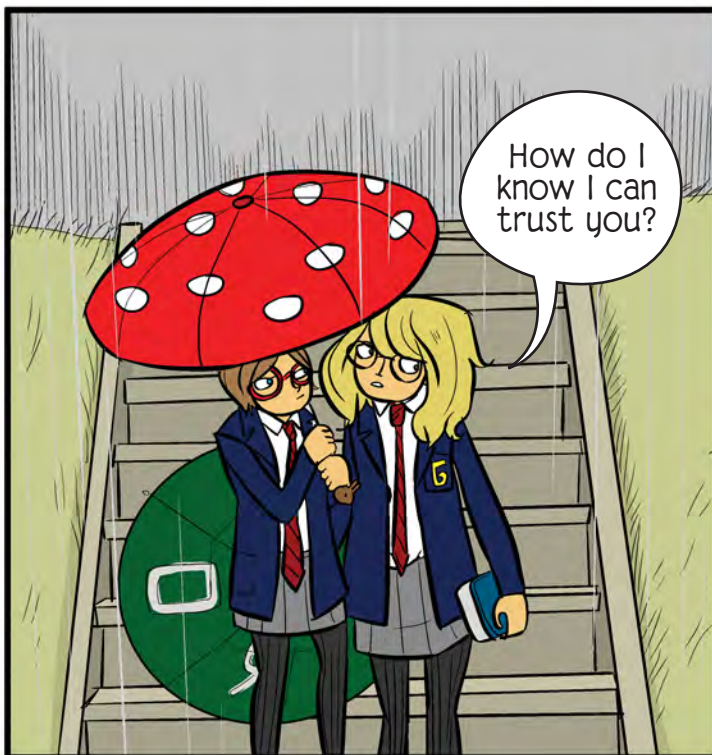
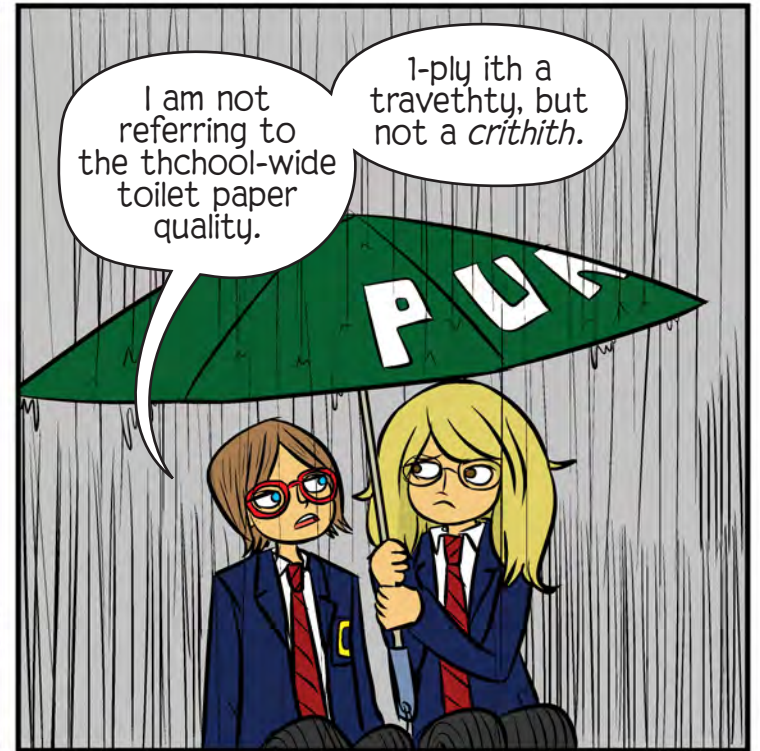
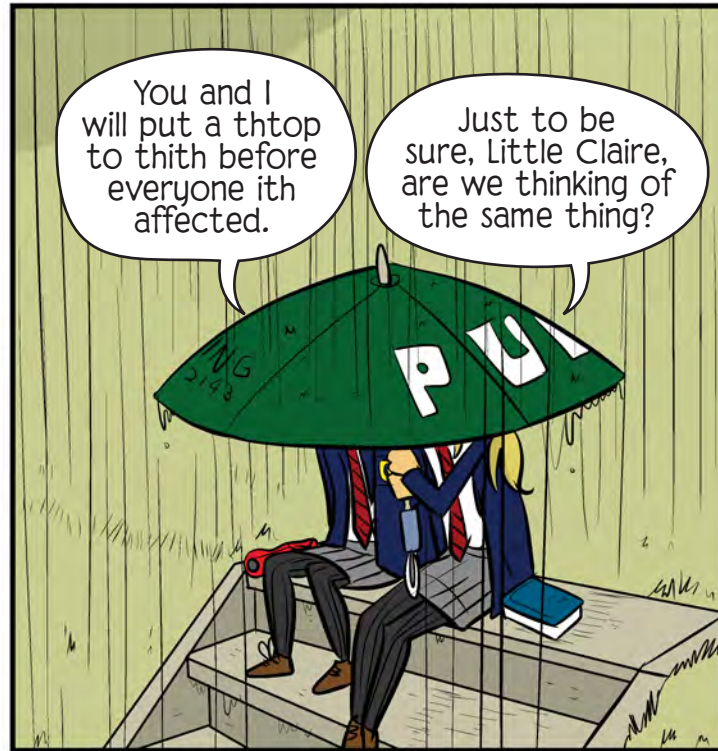
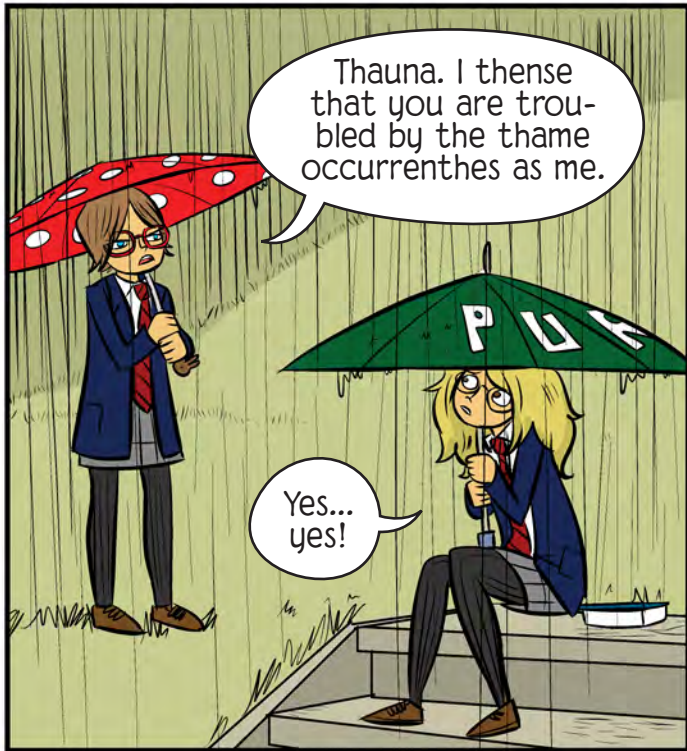
I think we should concentrate on our studies.

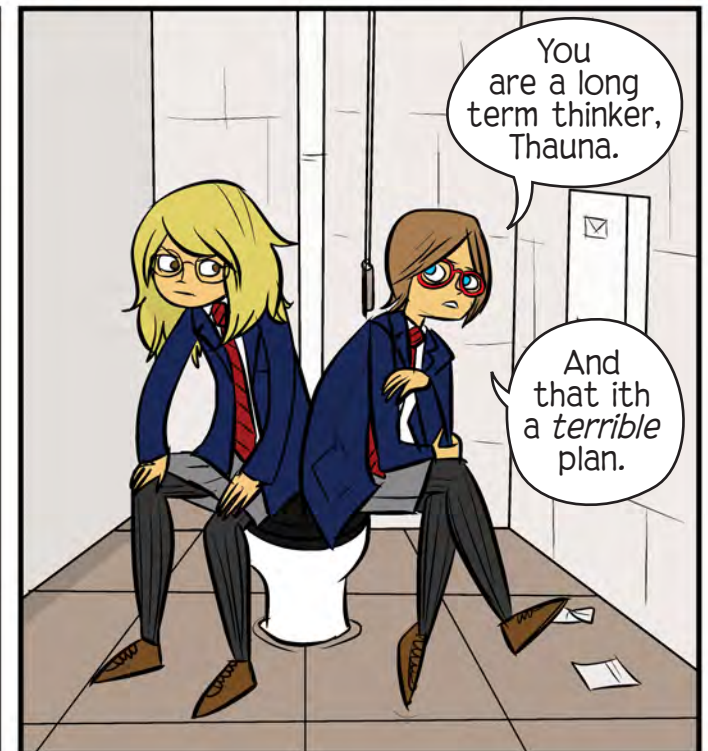
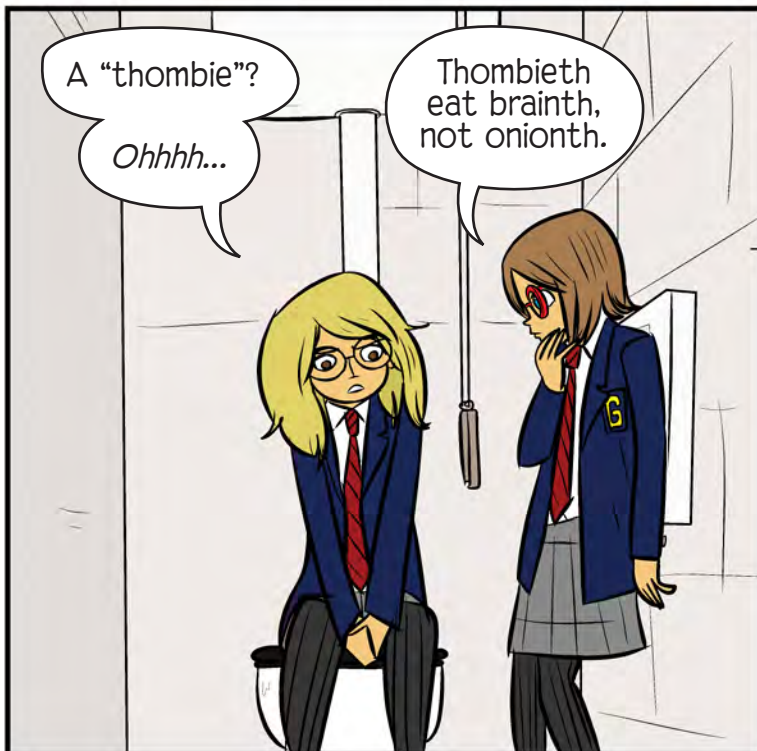
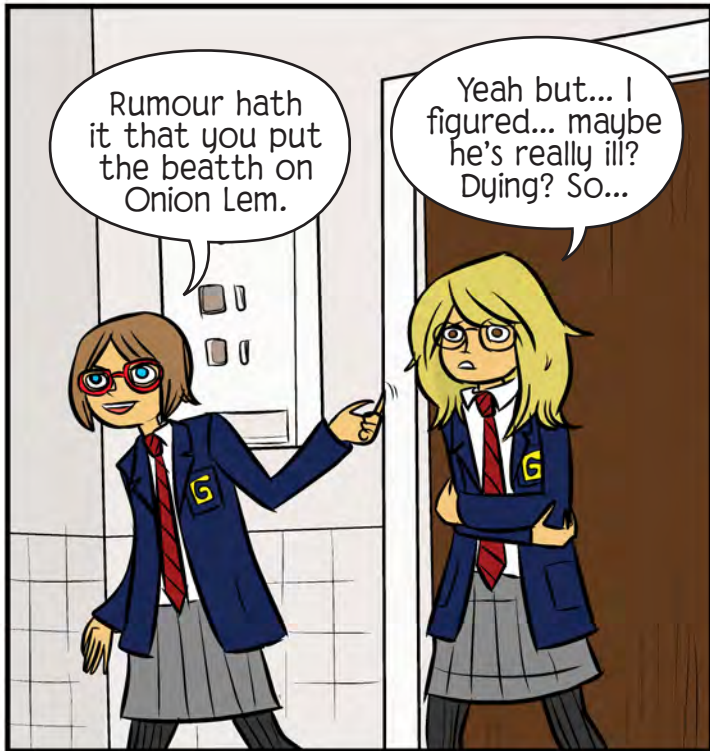
Yes, school is important.

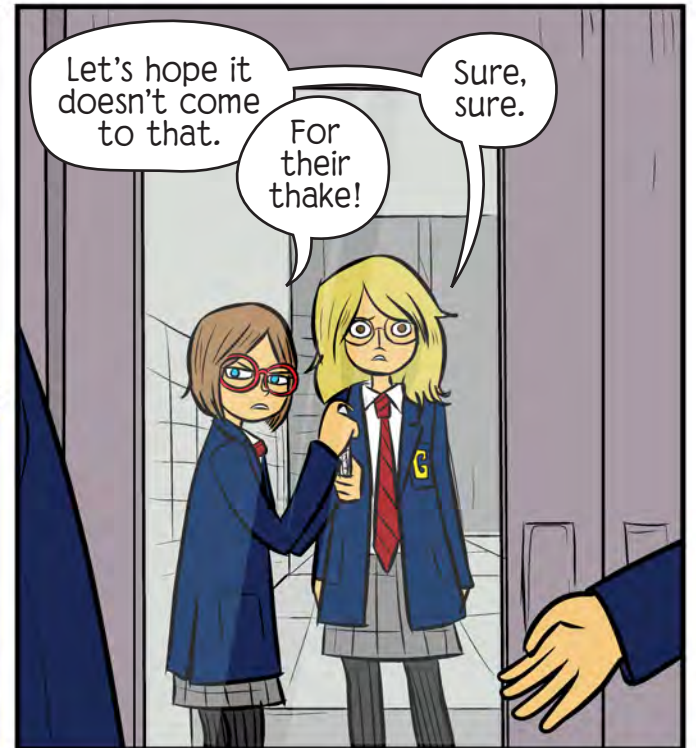
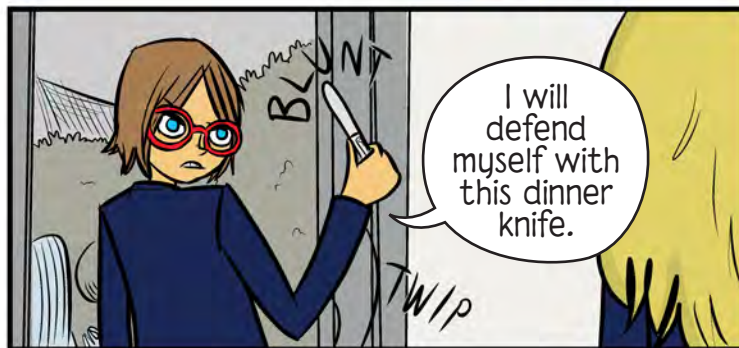
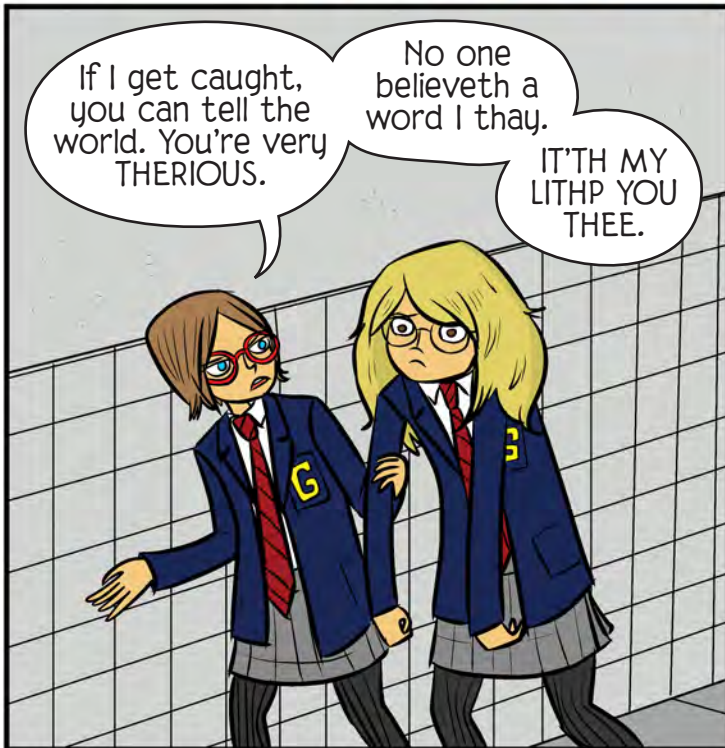
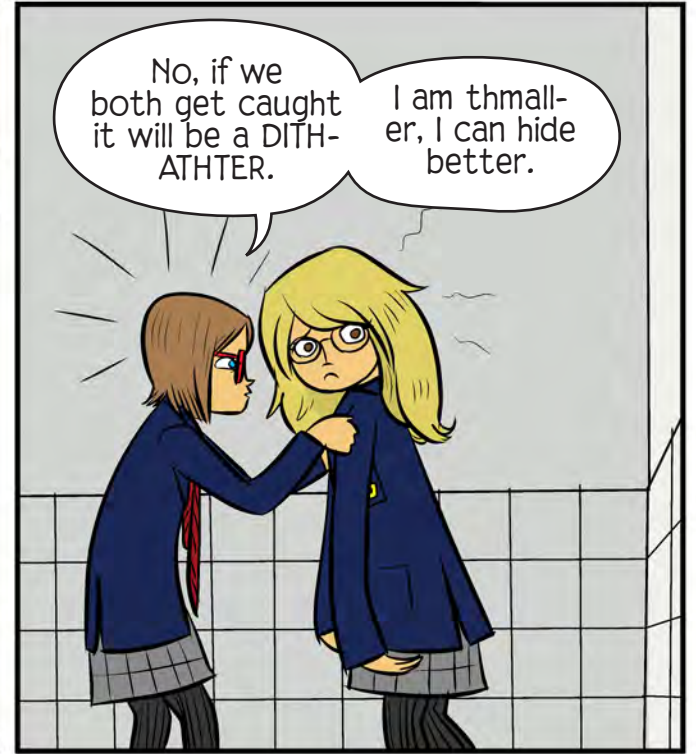
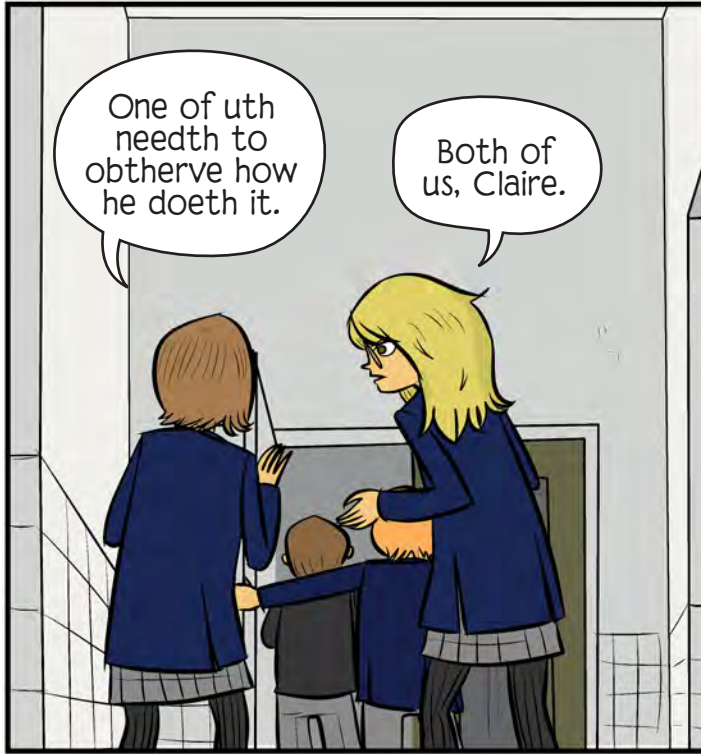
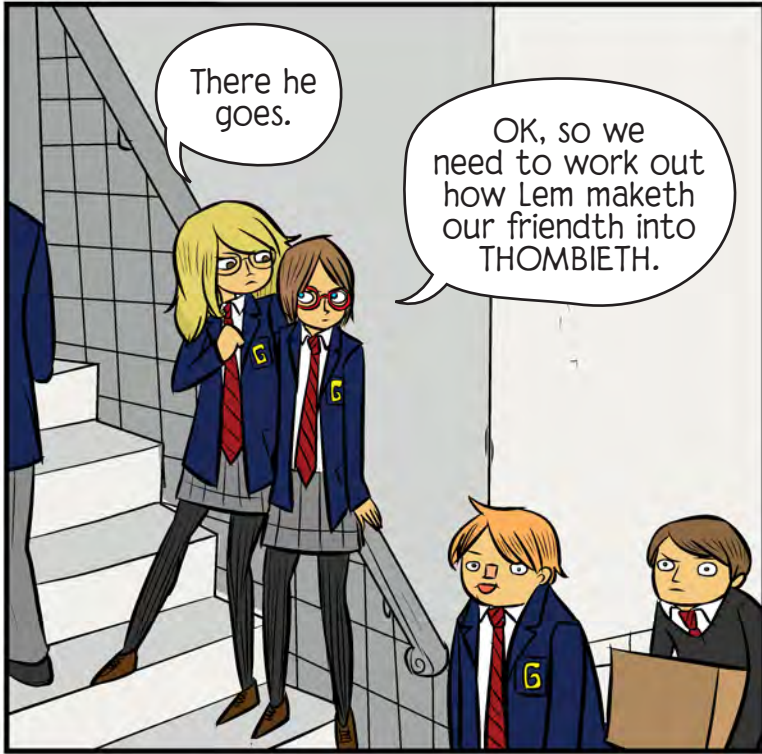
Did you two get caught on the naughty internet?

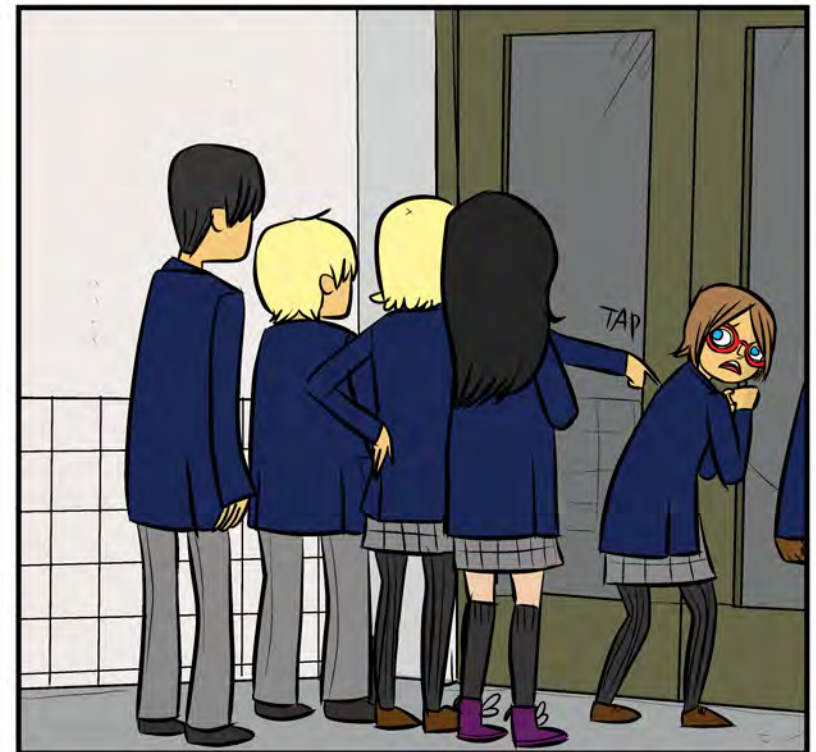
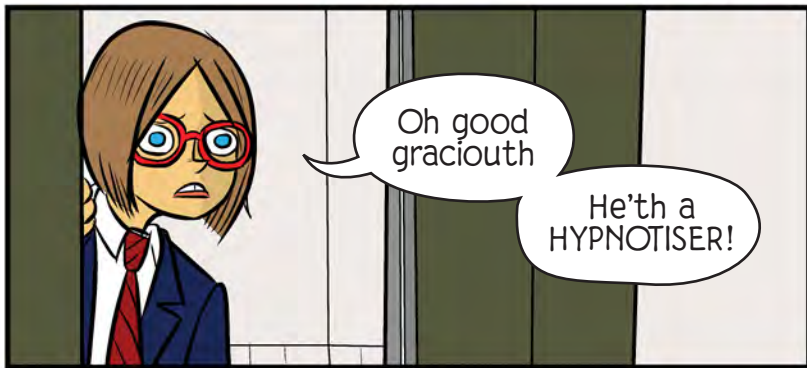
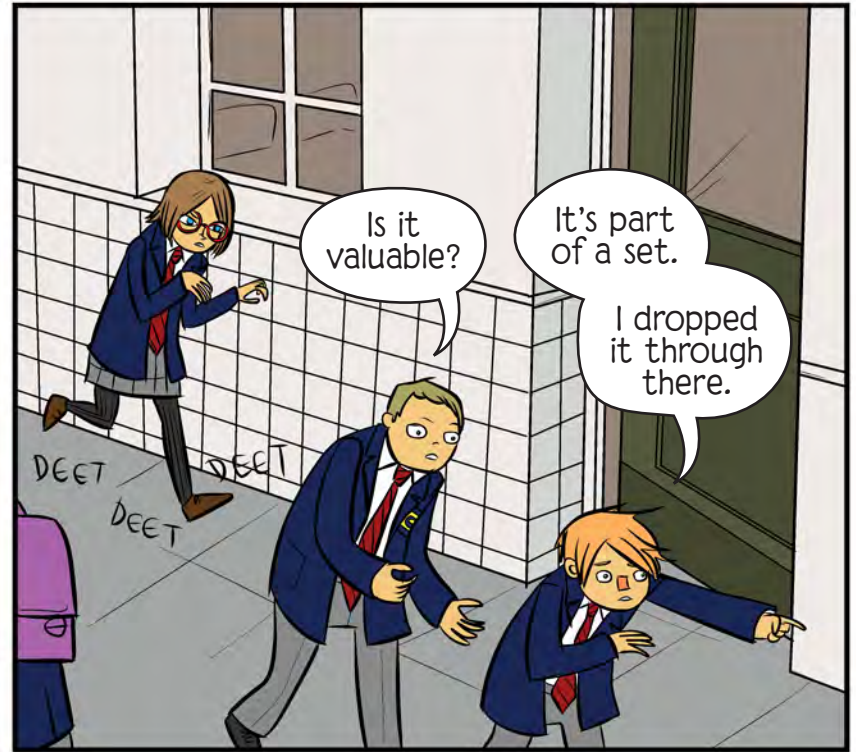
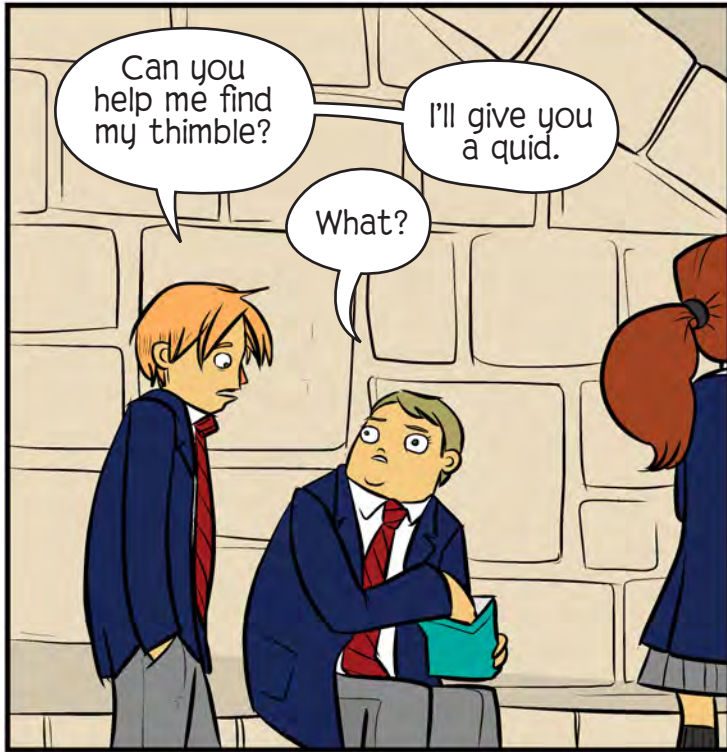


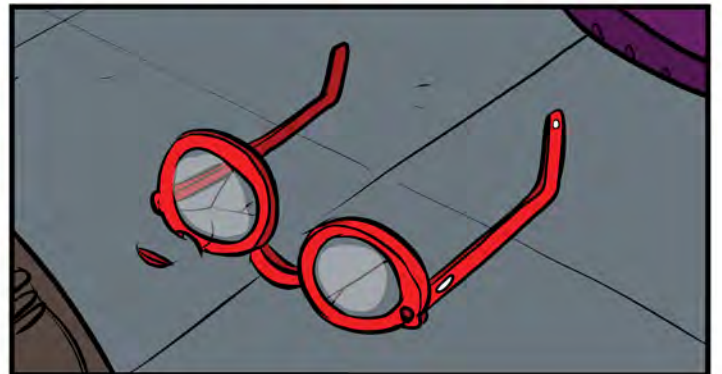
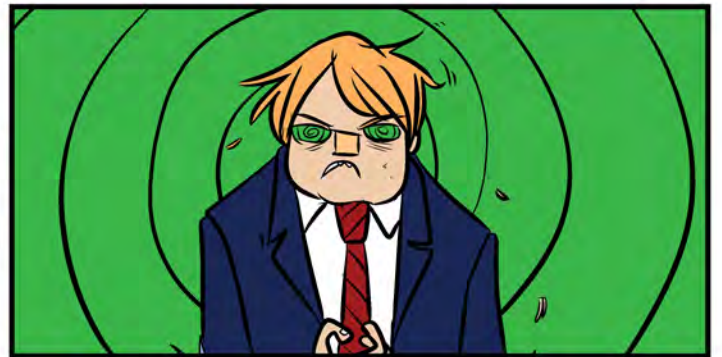
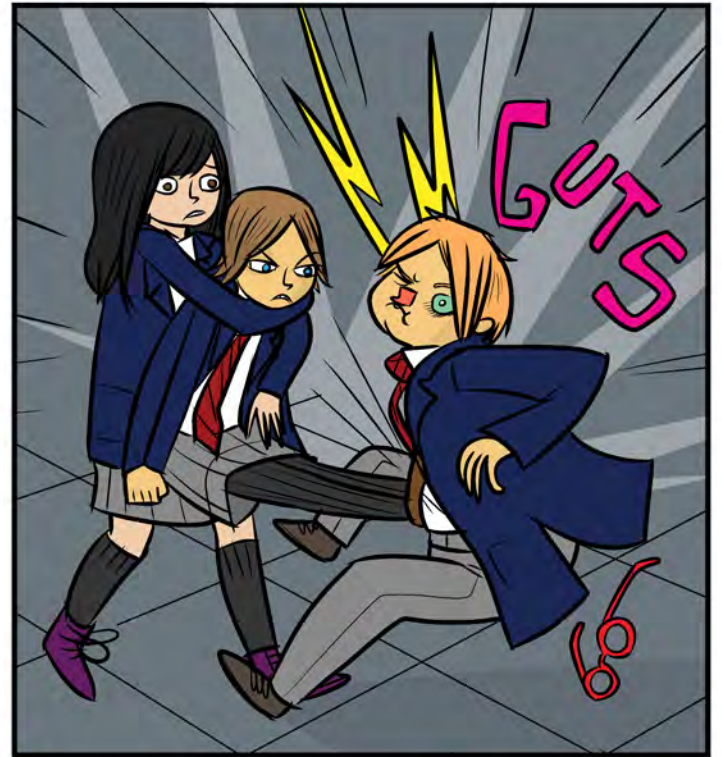
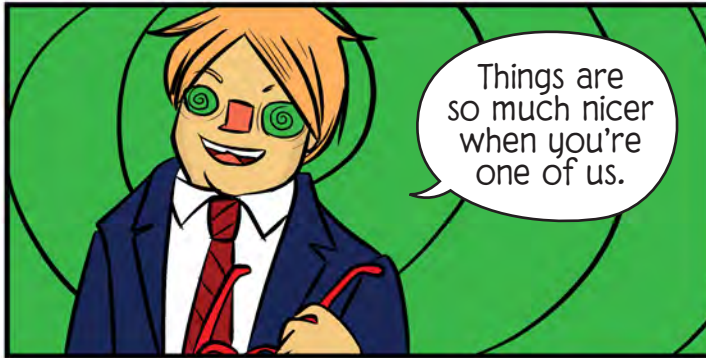
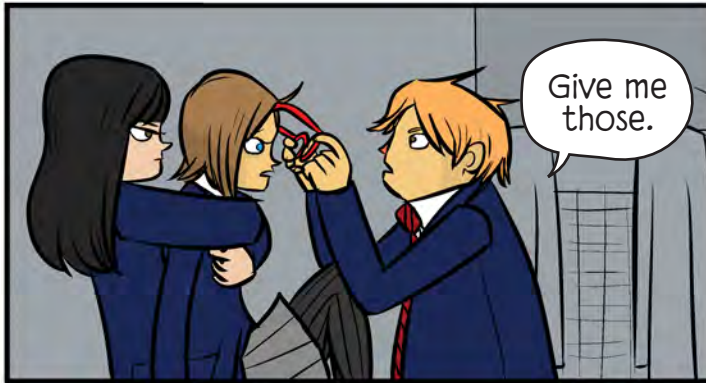


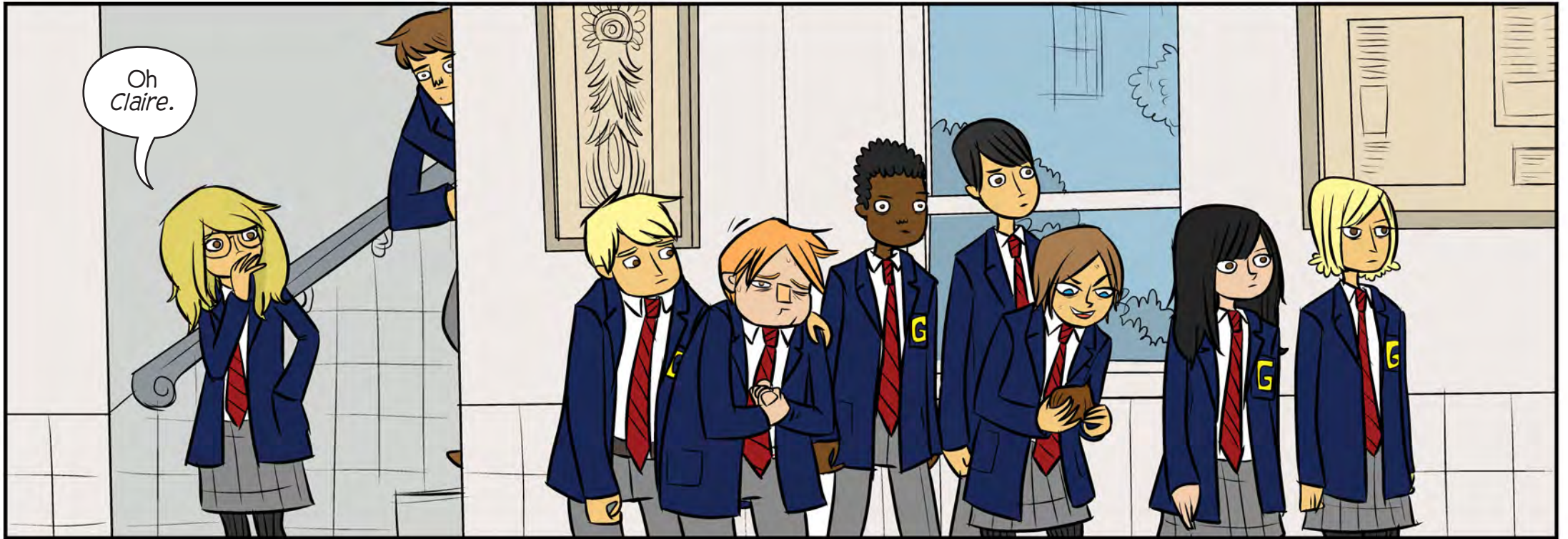


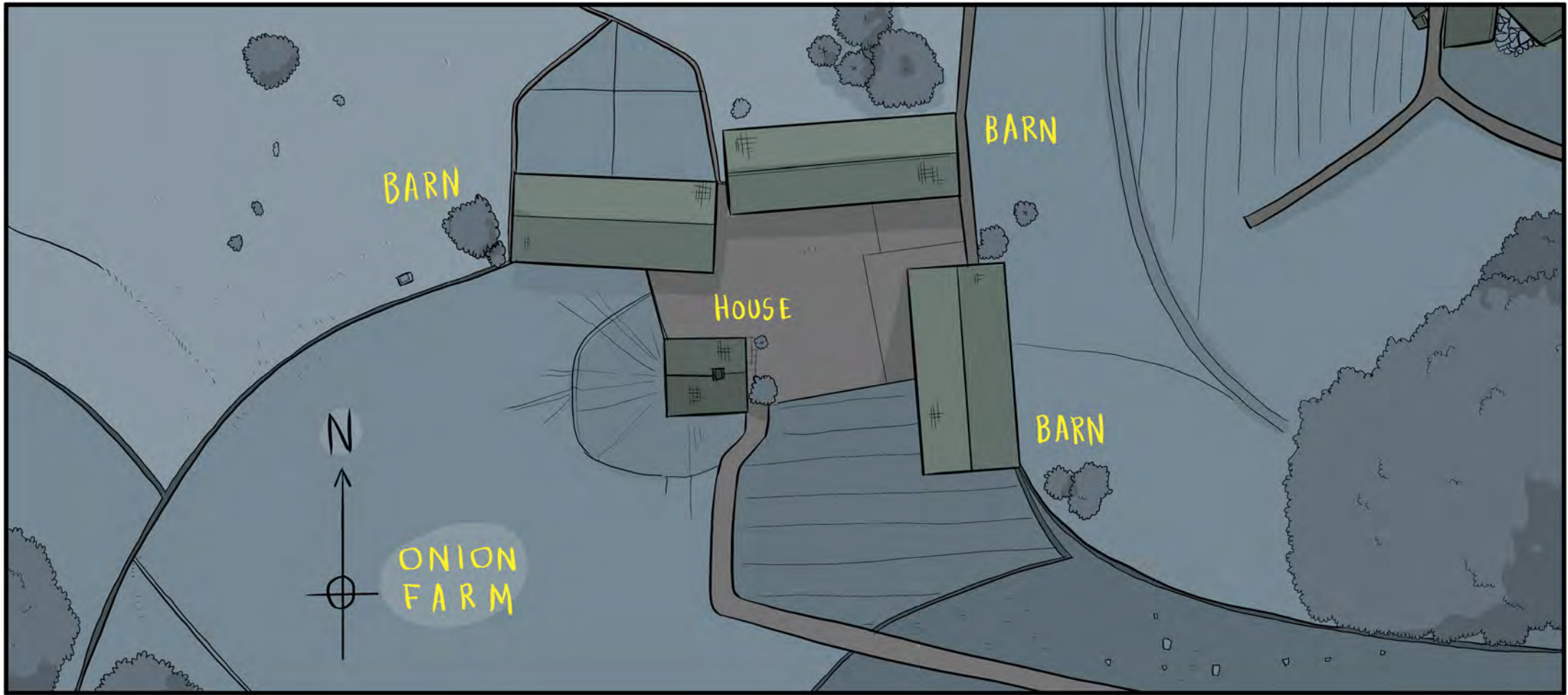
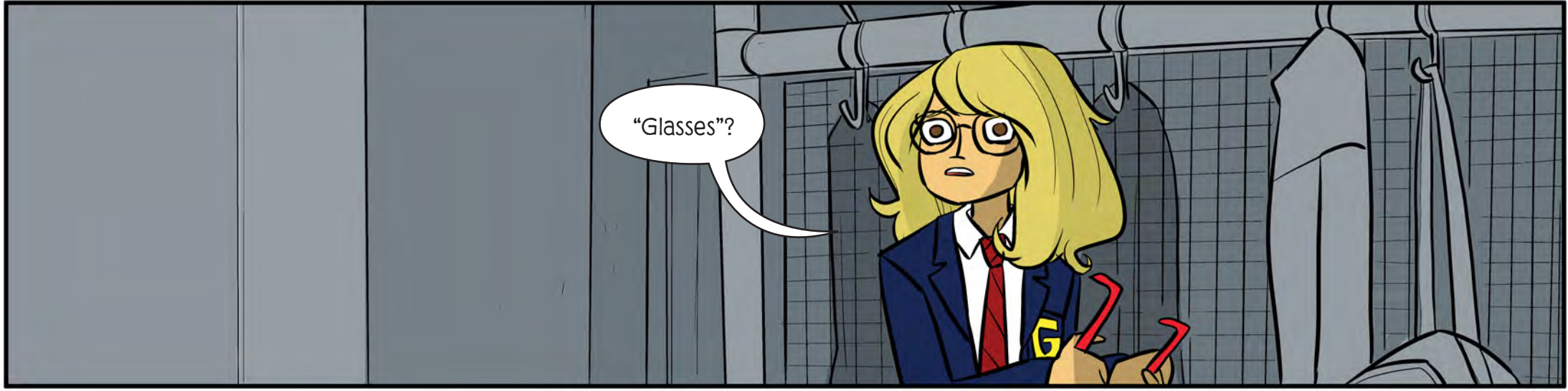




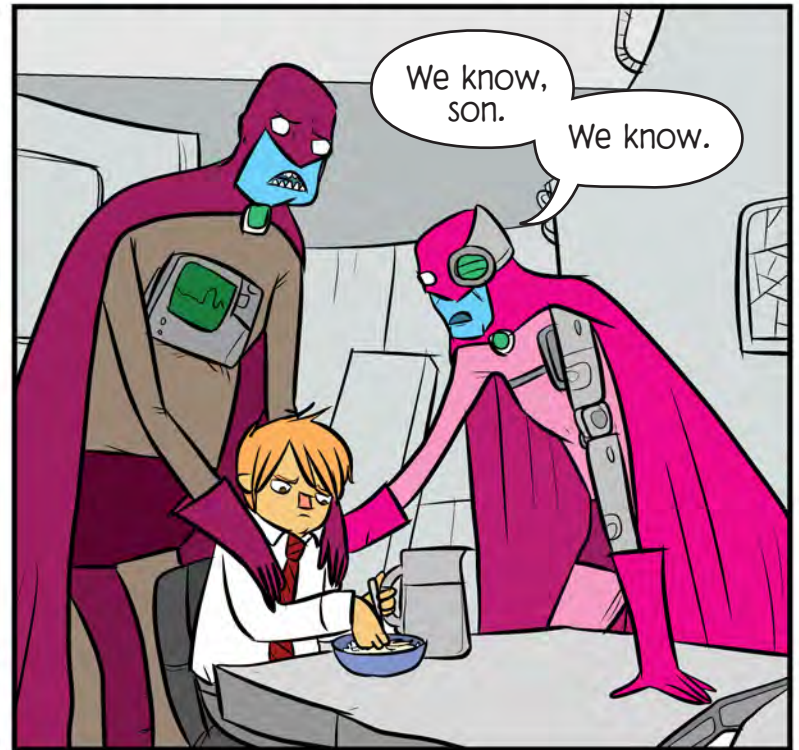
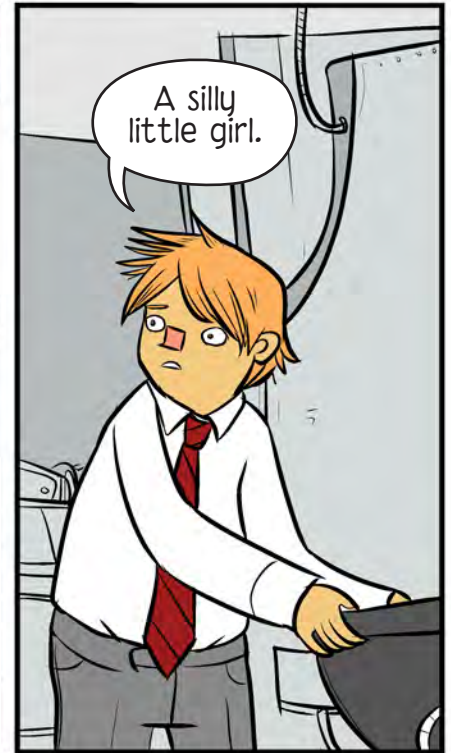
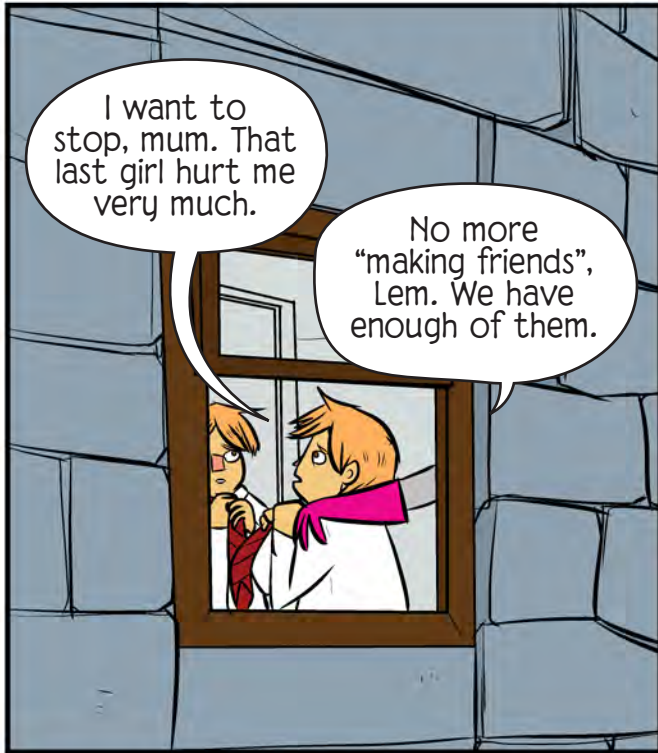


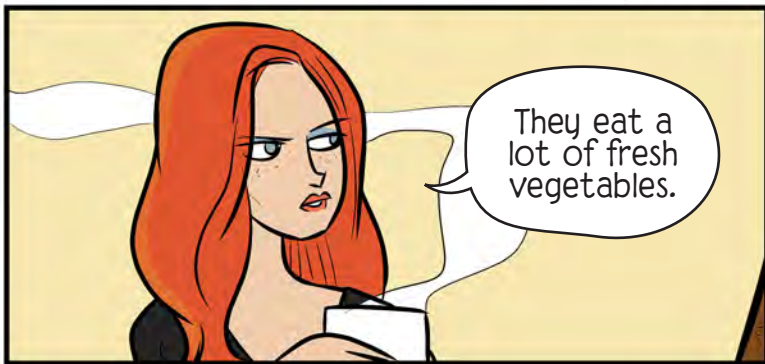
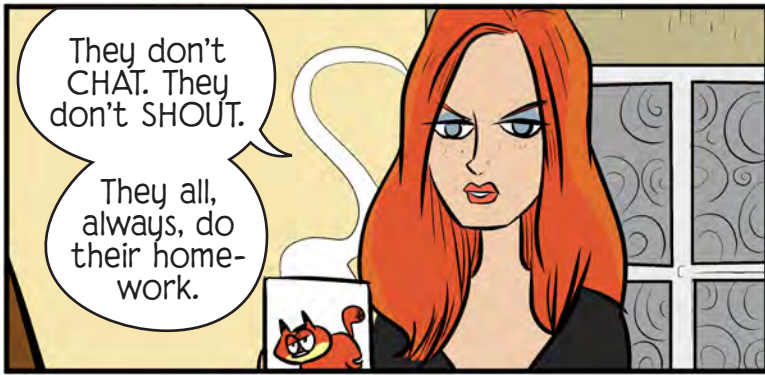
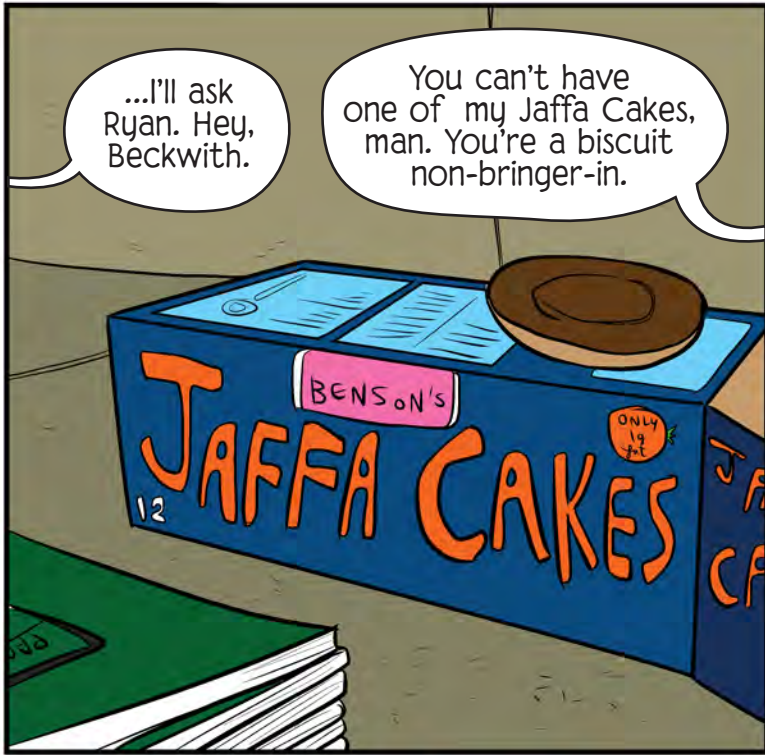




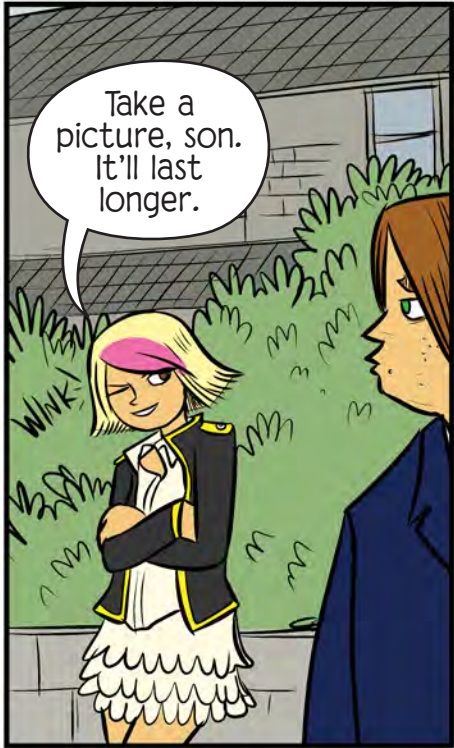


The Case of the Lonely One









Take a picture, son. It'll last longer.

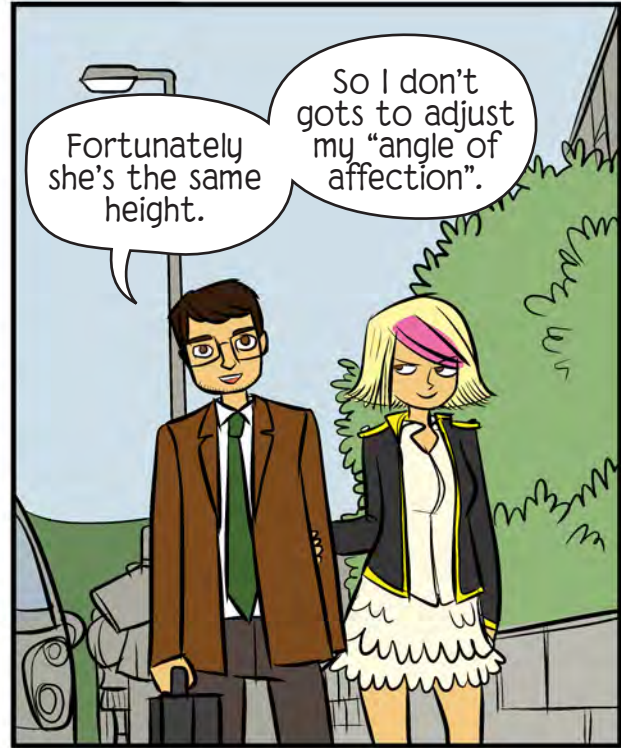


Have you seen my wife? She's meant to be waiting for me.

I had my hair did! Do you like it?

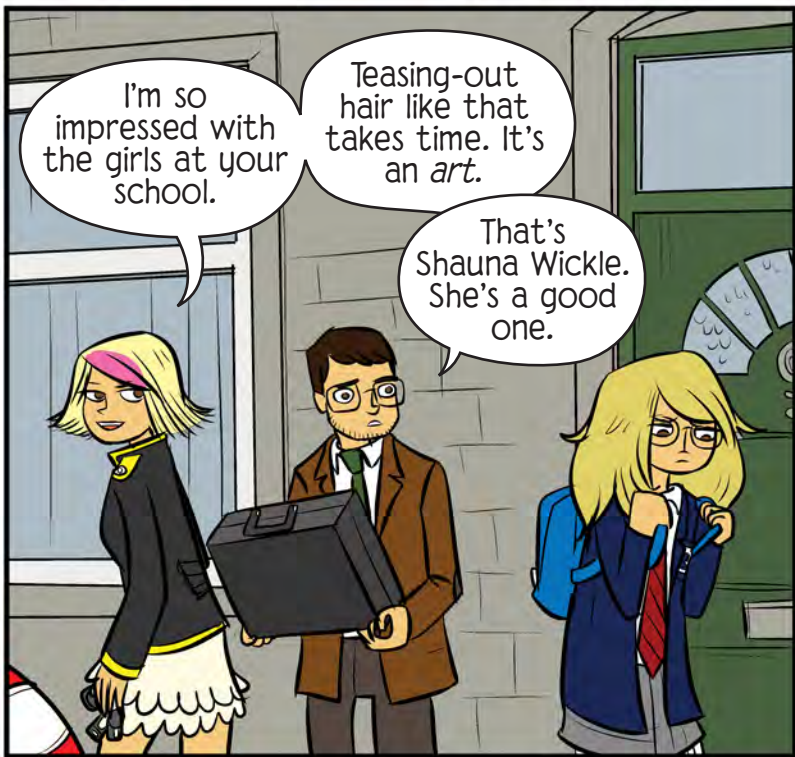


Yeah! It's like I'm married to a new woman.



Fortunately she's the same height.

So I don't gotta adjust my "angle of affection".



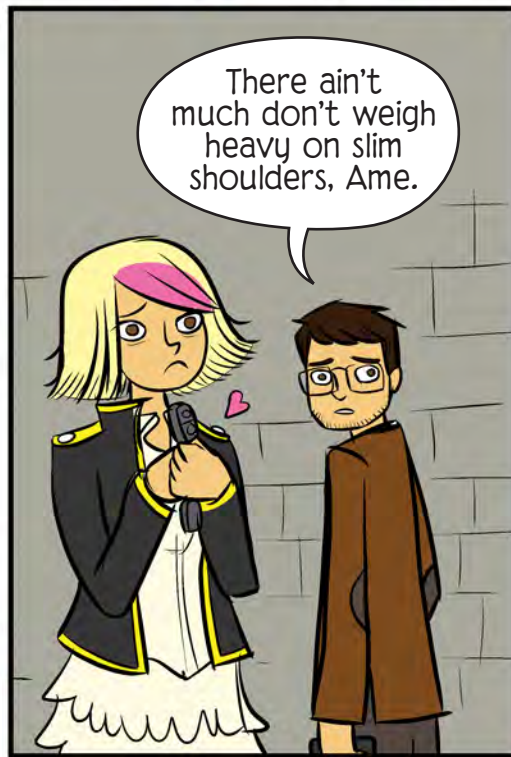
I'm so impressed with the girls at your school.

Teasing-out hair like that takes time. It's an art.

That's Shauna Wickle. She's a good one.



But man, she don't look right of late.

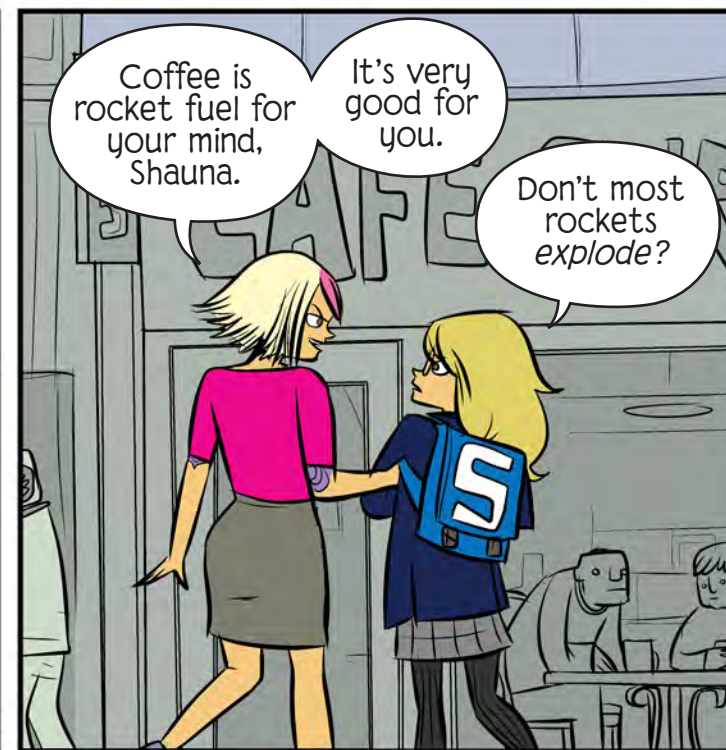
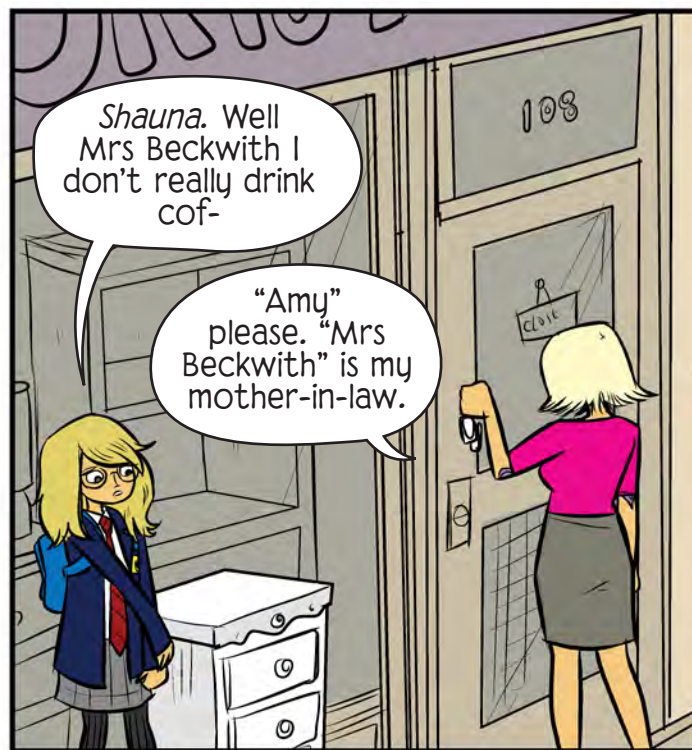
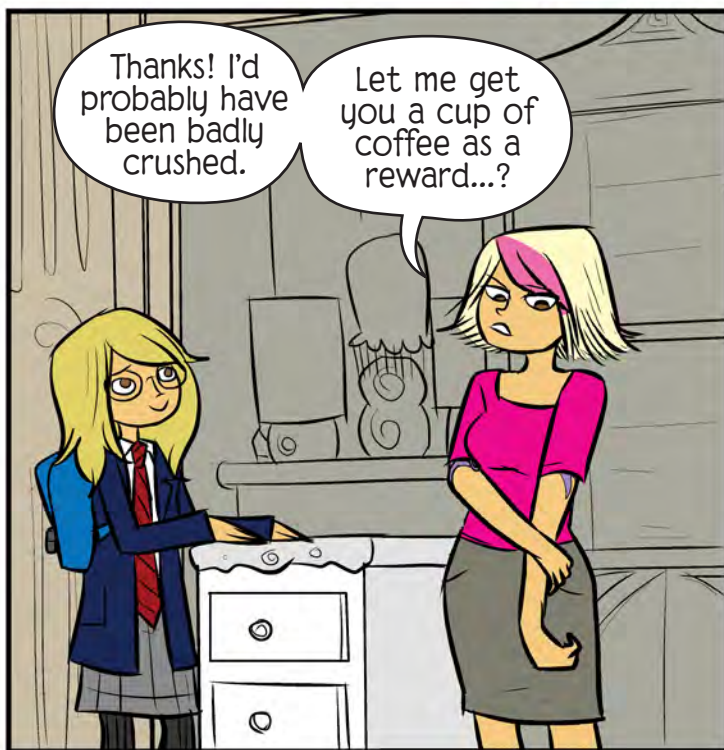
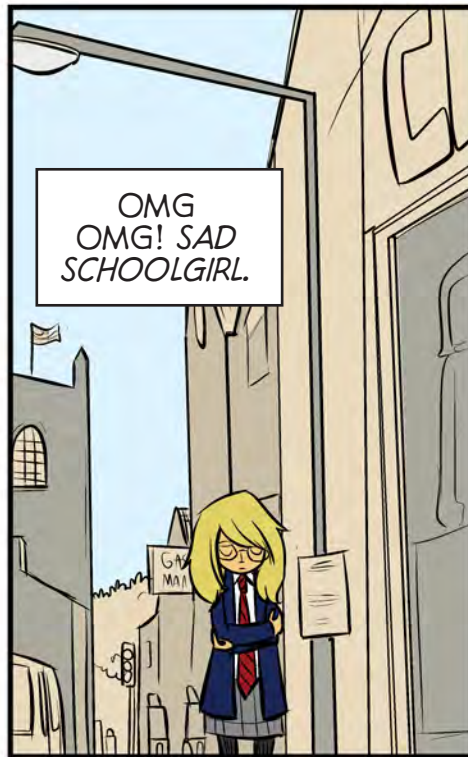


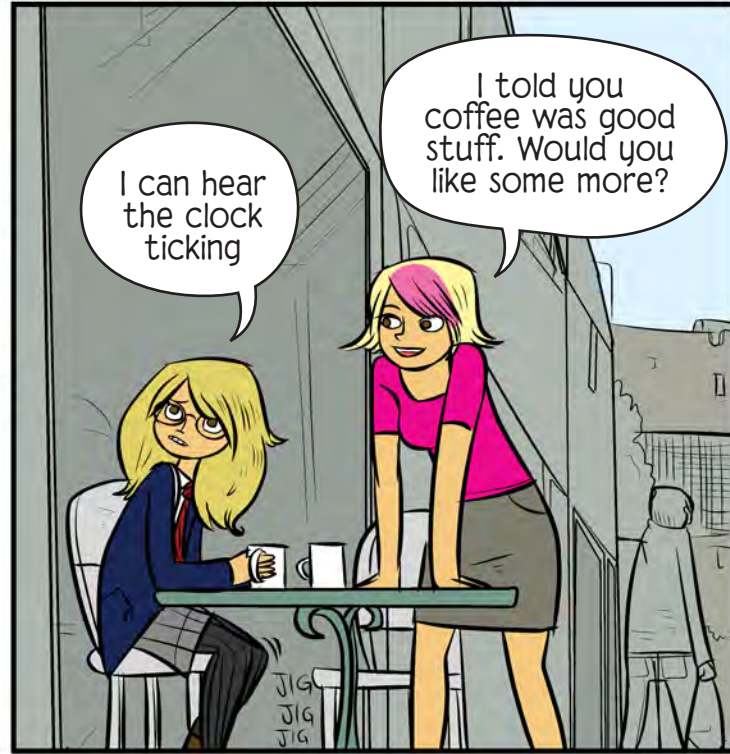
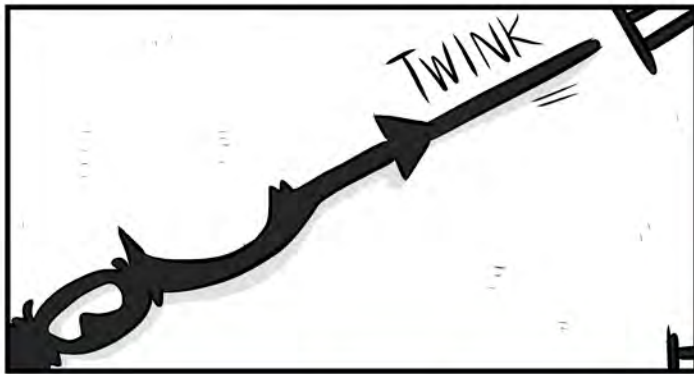
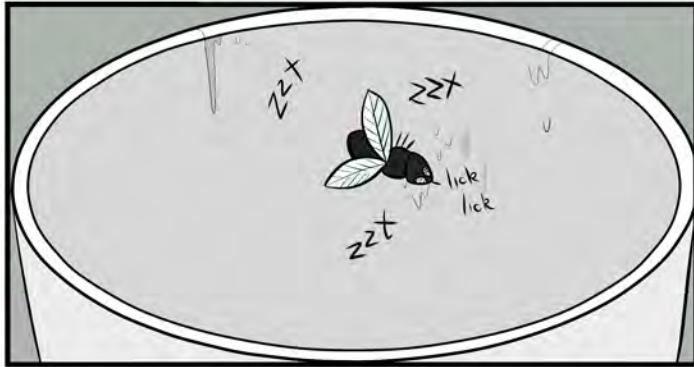
There ain't much don't weigh heavy on slim shoulders, Ame.



Well thanks for that insight, Cowboy Confucius.

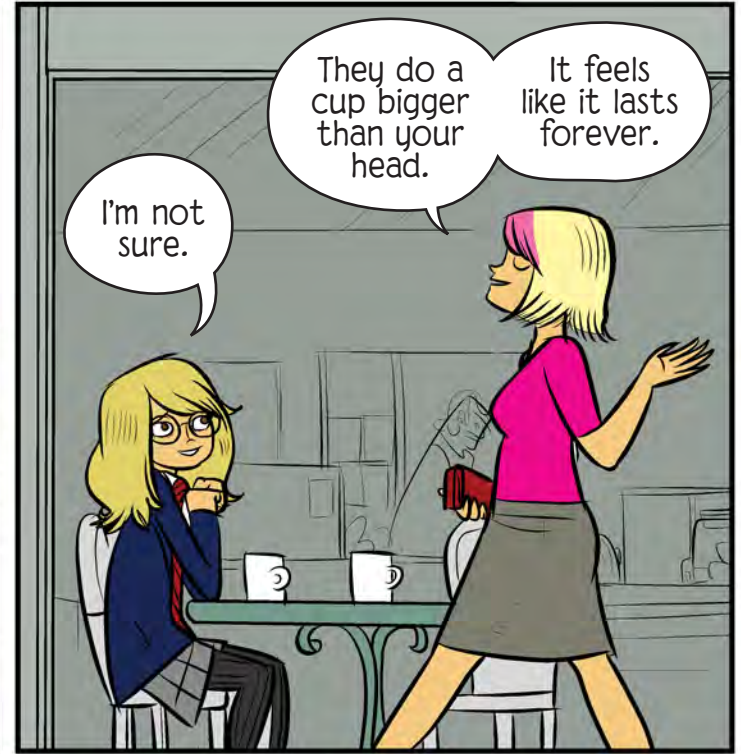






I can hear the clock ticking

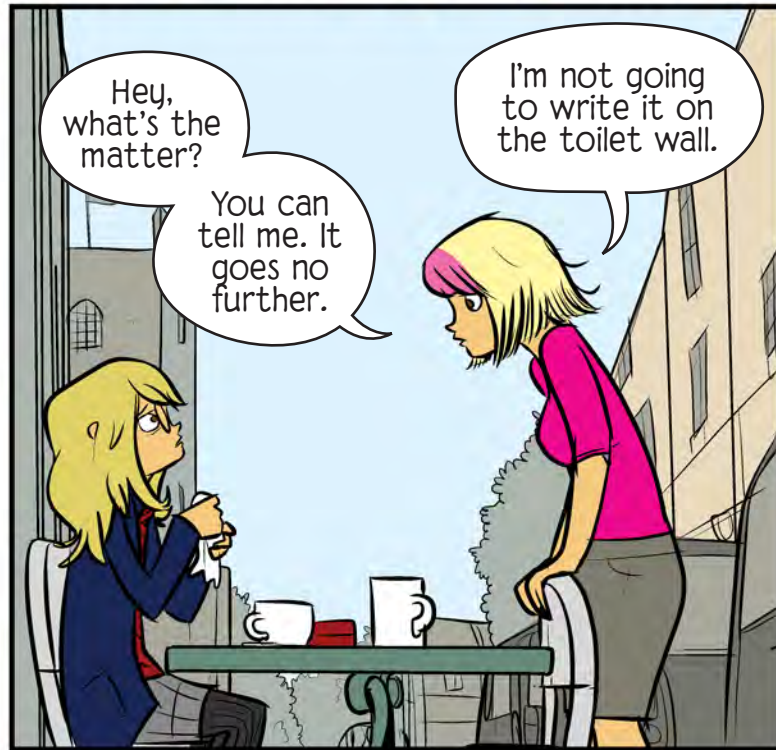
I told you coffee was good stuff. Would you like some more?



I'm not sure.

They do a cup bigger than your head.

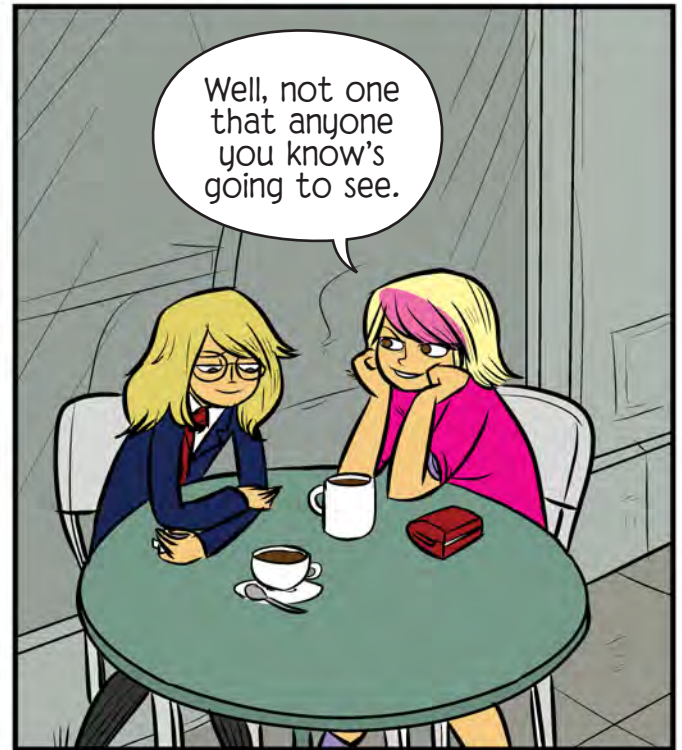
It feels like it lasts forever.



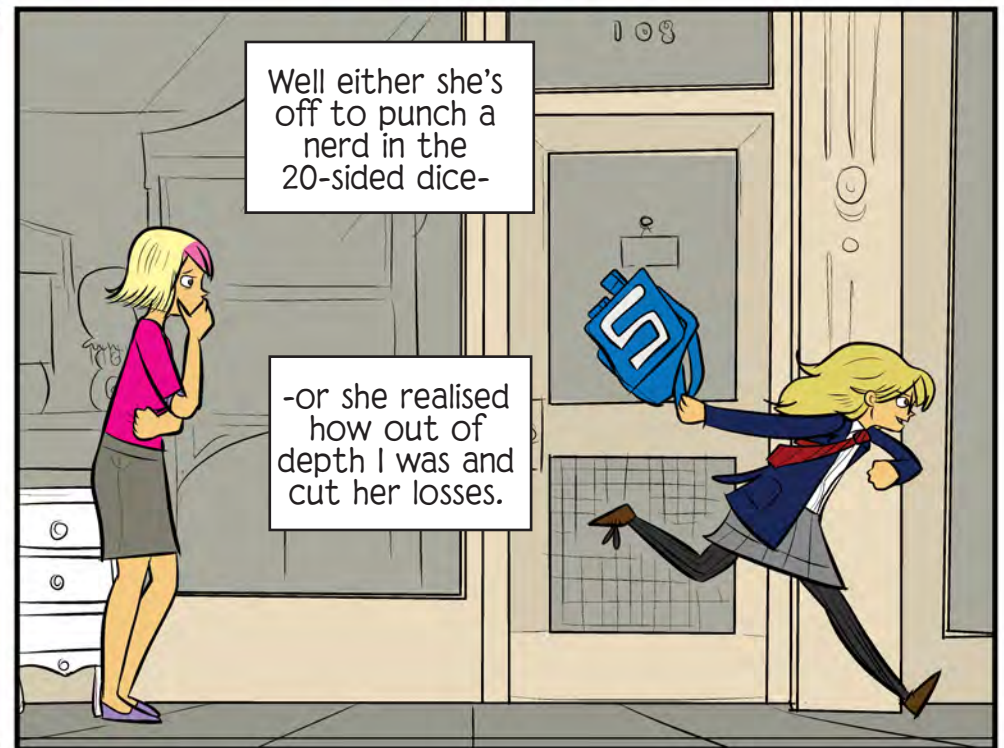
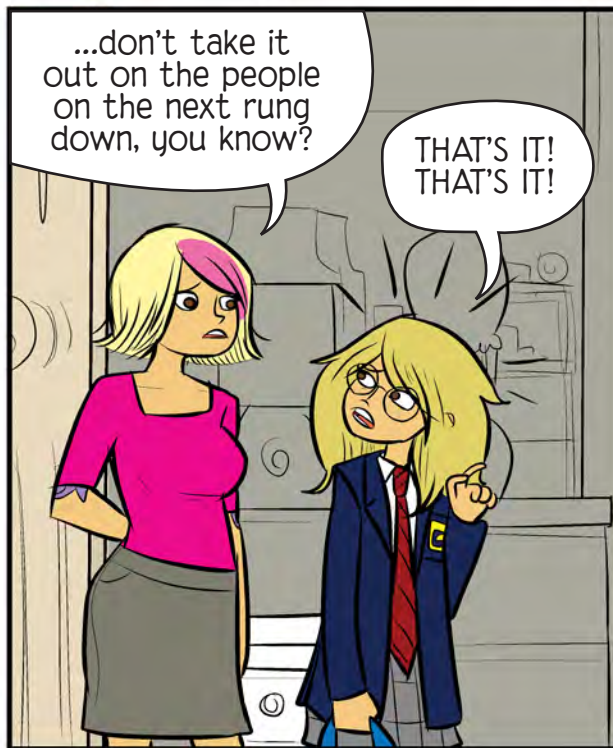
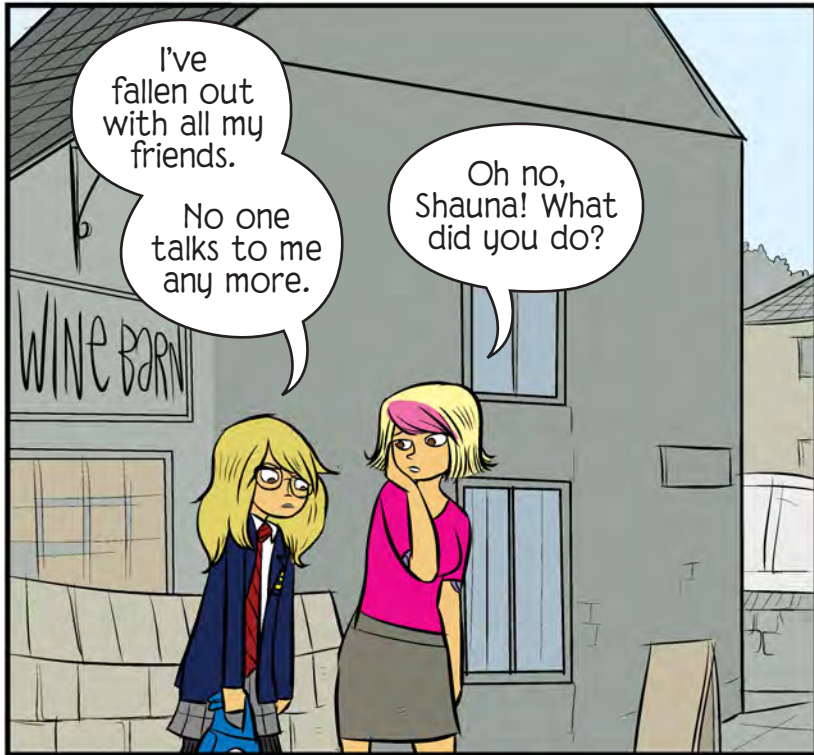
Hey, what's the matter?

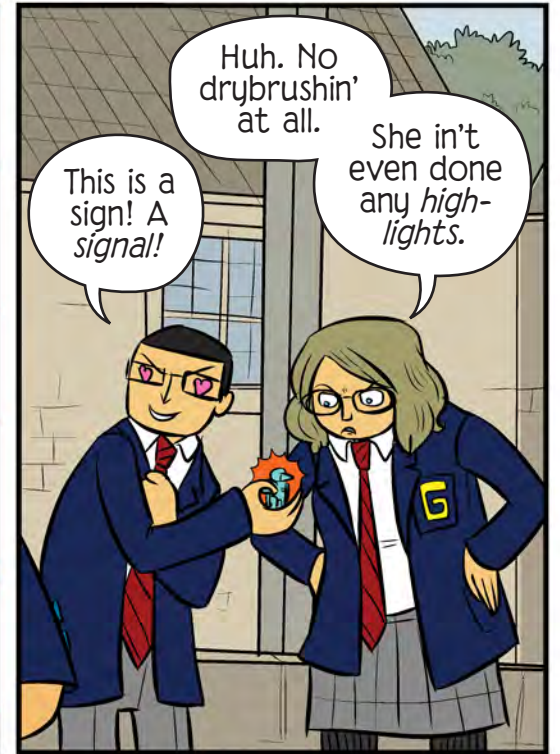
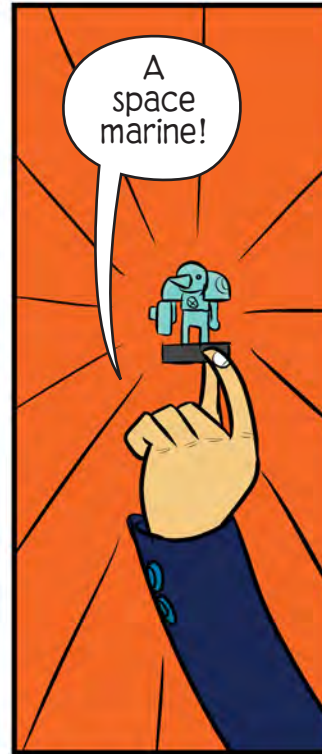
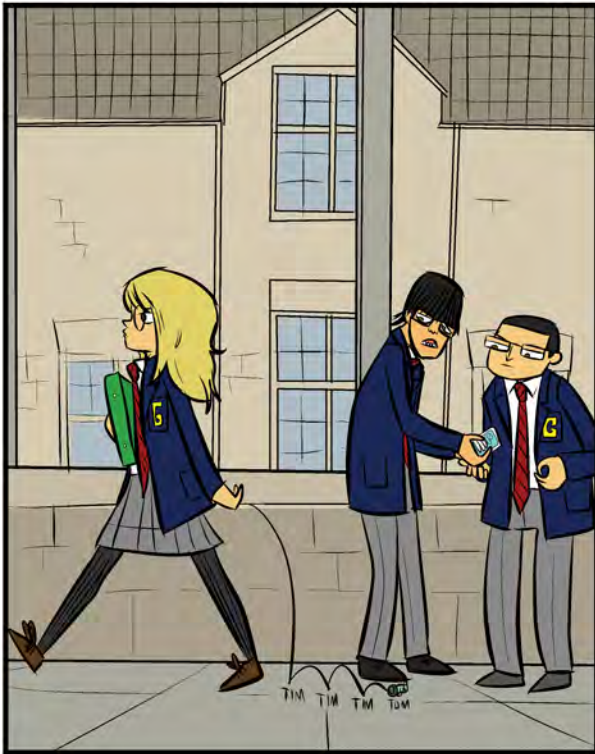
You can tell me. It goes no further.

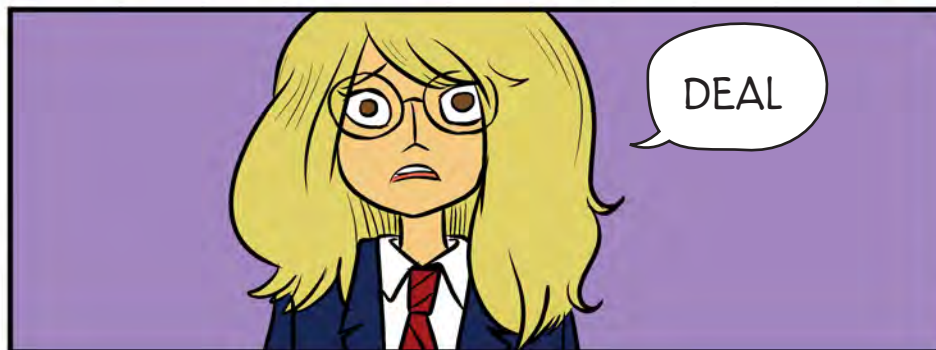
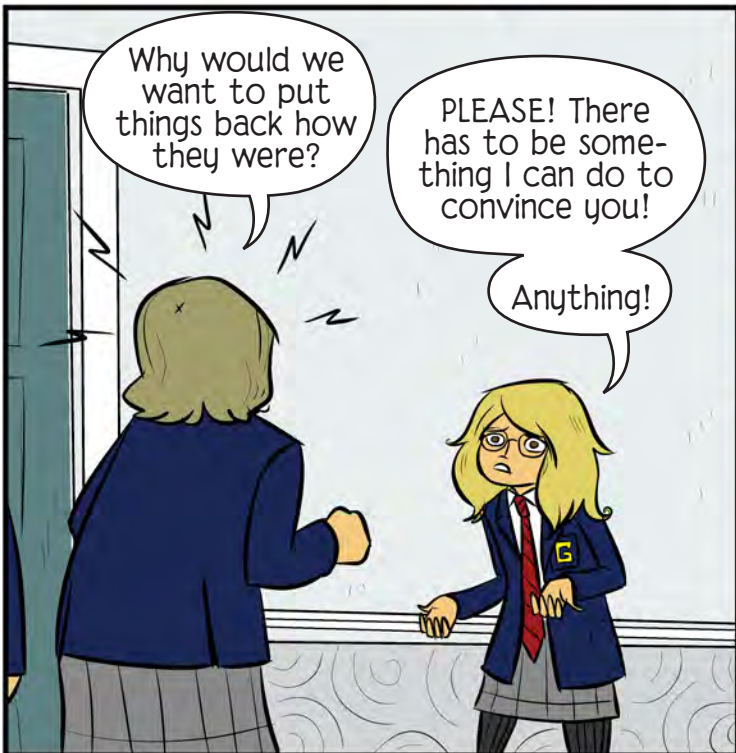
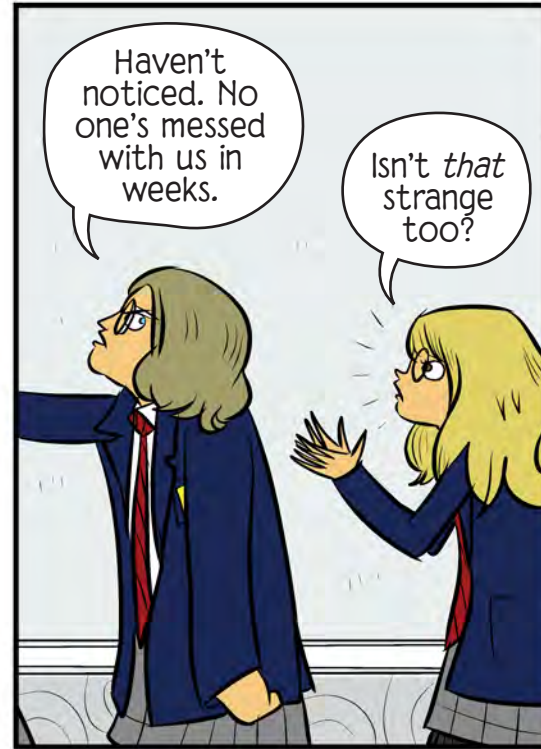
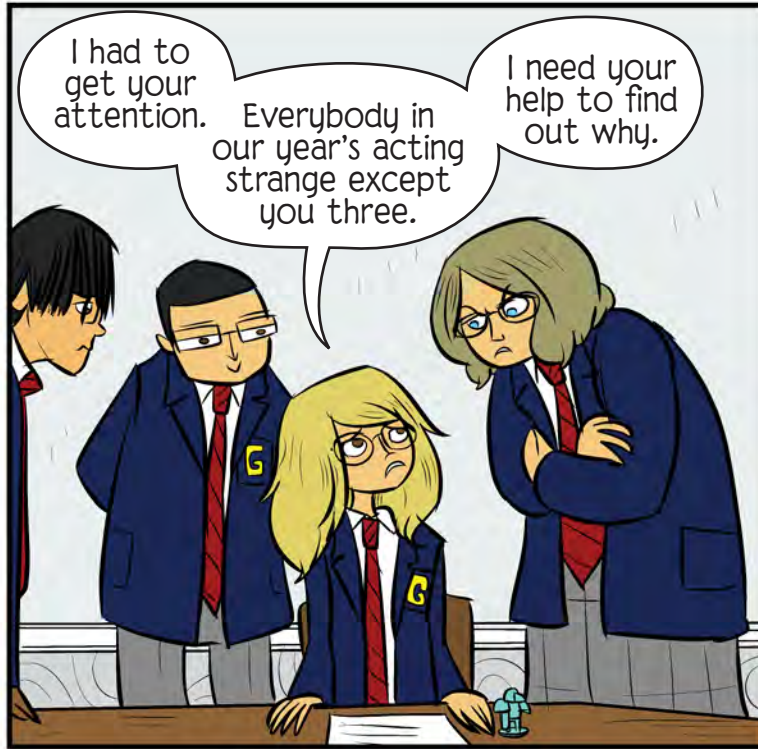
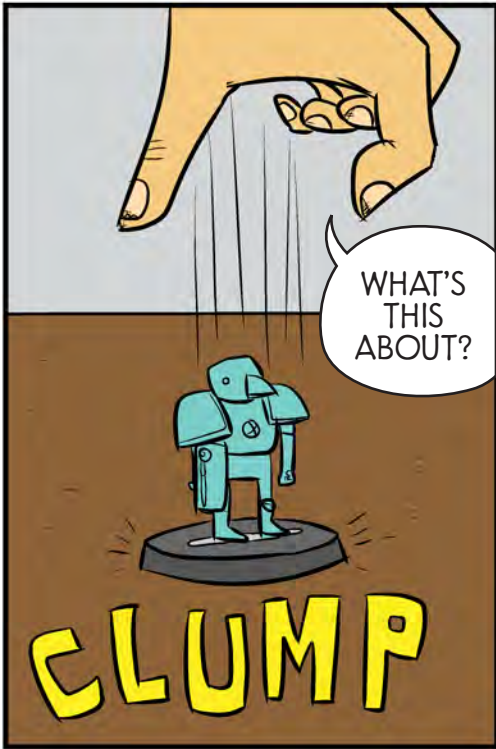
I'm not going to write it on the toilet wall.

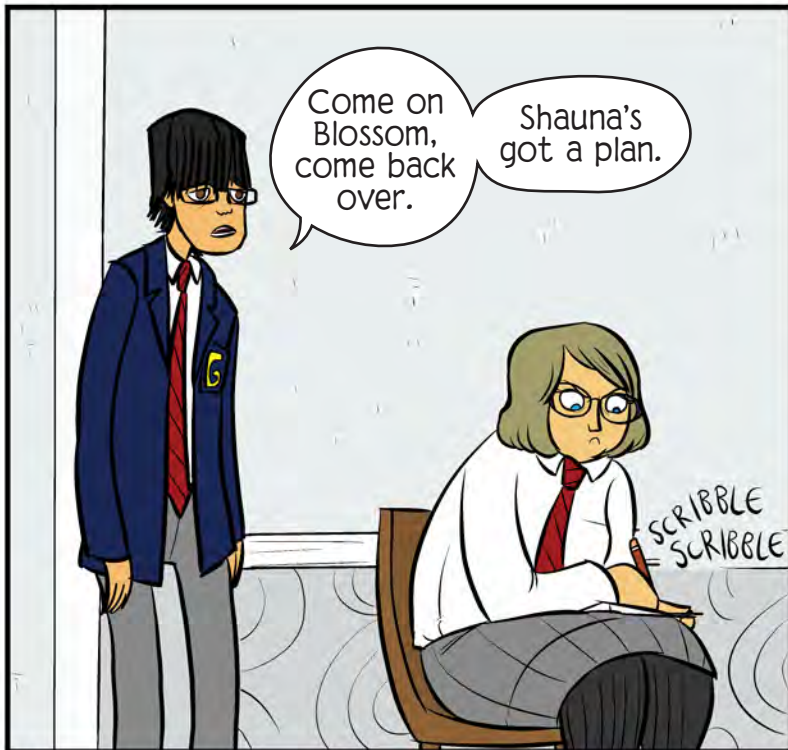


Well, not one that anyone you know's going to see.









Come on Blossom, come back over.

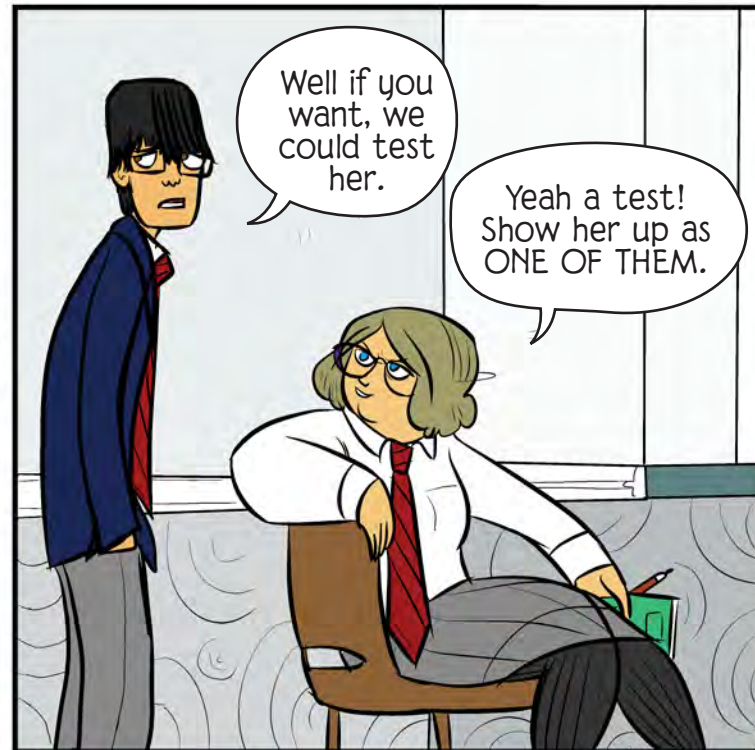
Shauna's got a plan.

SCRIBBLE  
SCRIBBLE



She in't one of us, Tuan.

She's usin' us, but you lads want to be used.



Well if you want, we could test her.

Yeah a test! Show her up as ONE OF THEM.



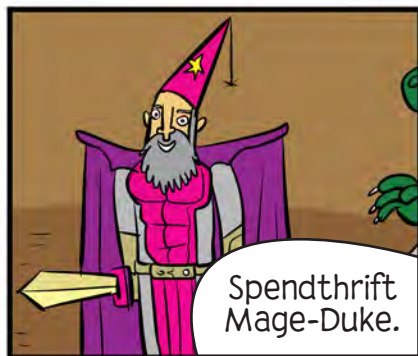
Dwarf.



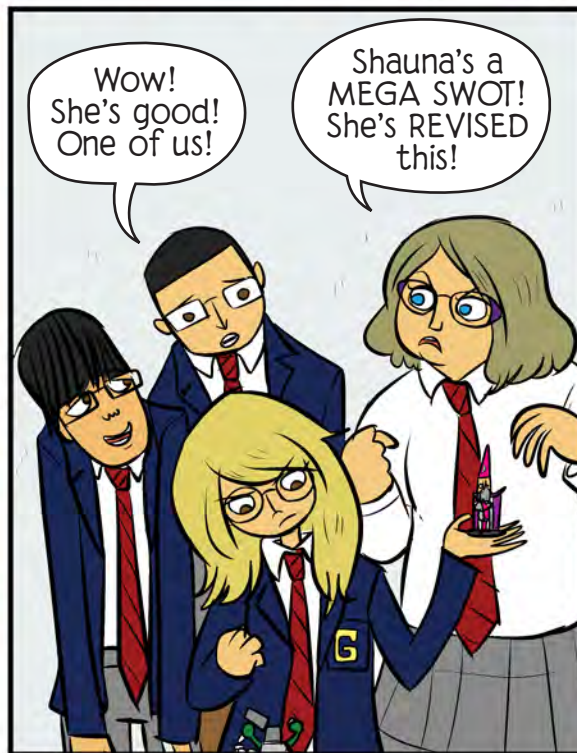
Elf.



Chaotic good Paladin



Spendthrift Mage-Duke.



Wow! She's good! One of us!

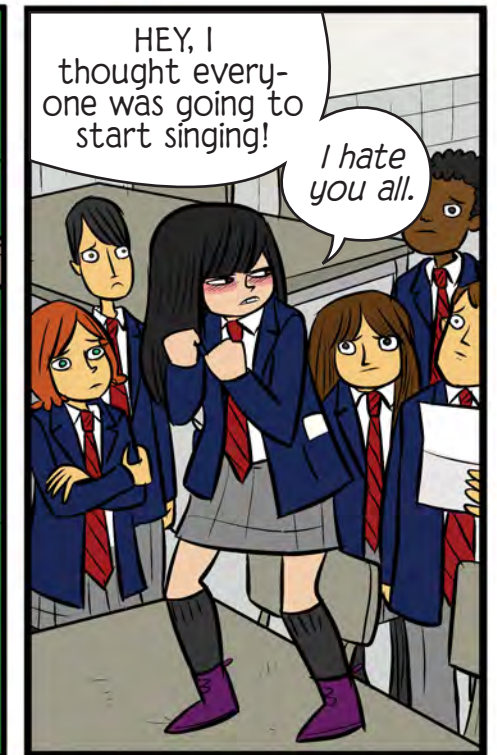
Shauna's a MEGA SWOT! She's REVISED this!

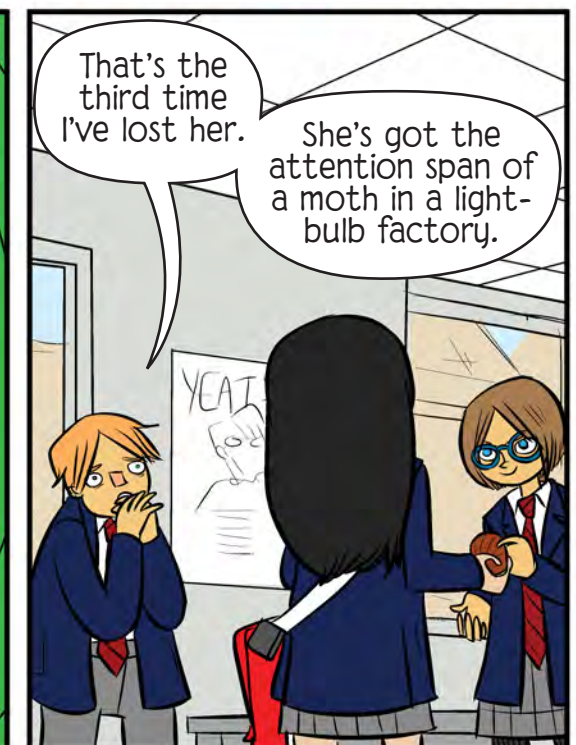


That's two orcs you glued together and made a new head for out of a thimble.

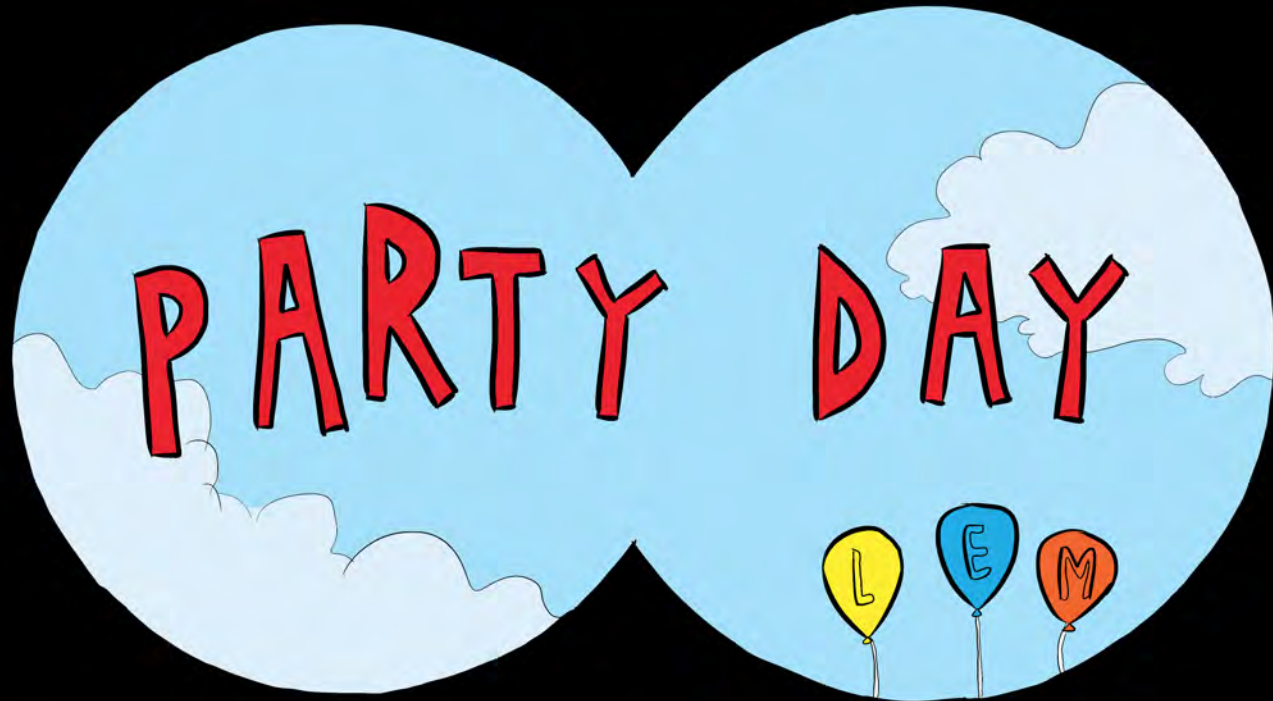
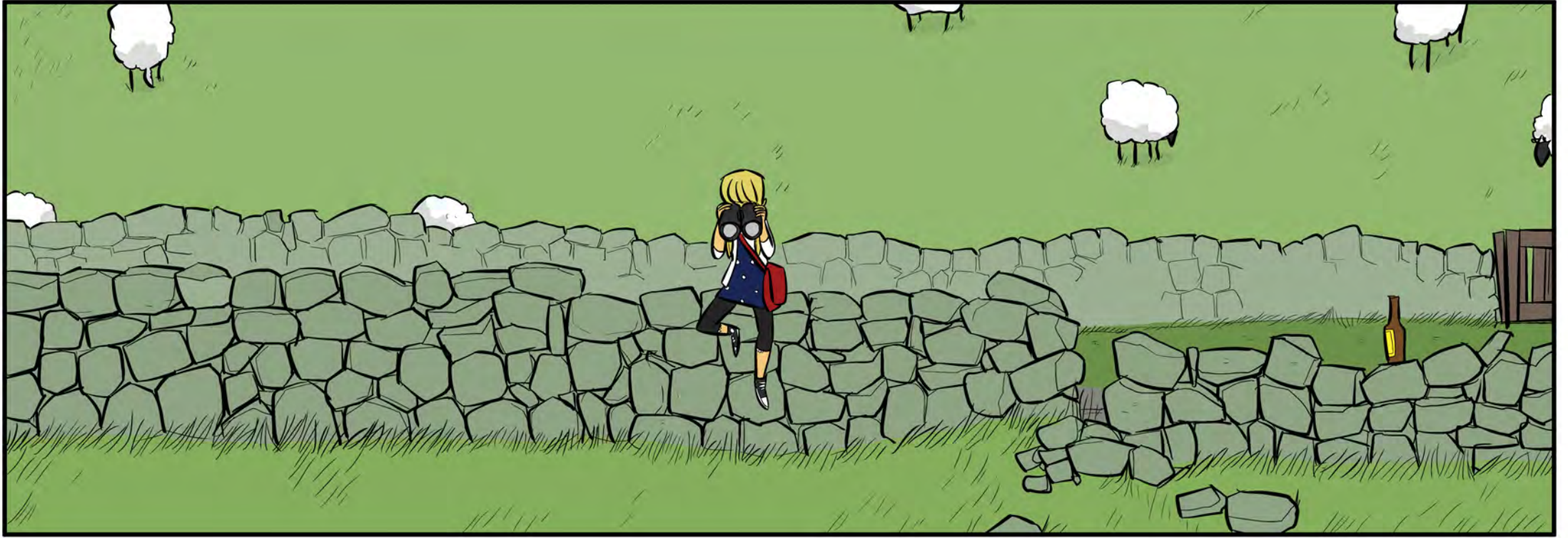
SO UNFAIR.













Wow, no wonder Lem is weird...



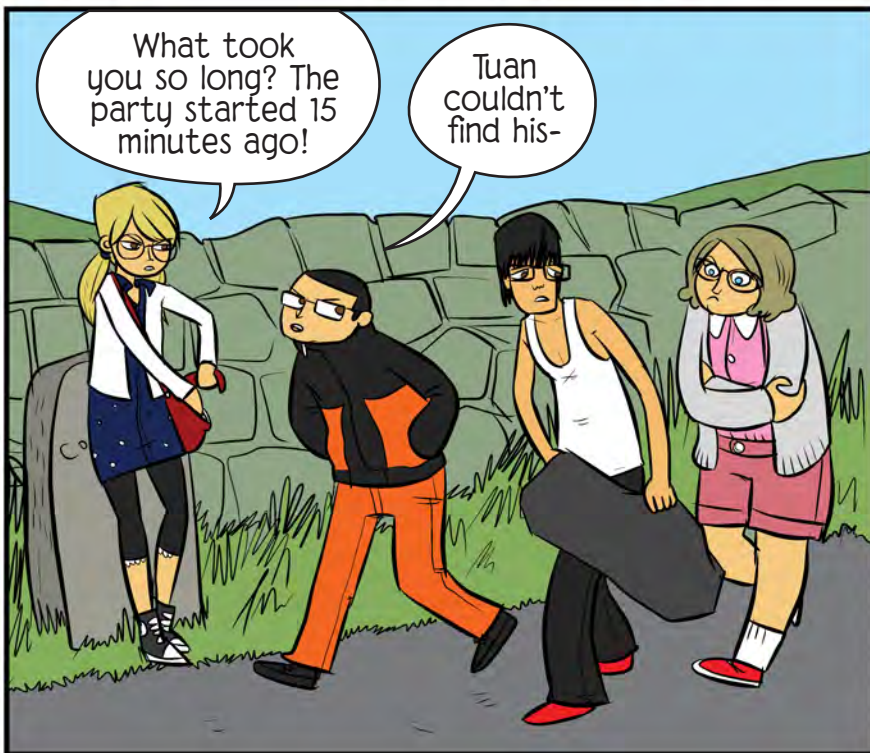
...look at his parents!



I'd feel sorry for him if he wasn't a mad bodysnatchin' freak.

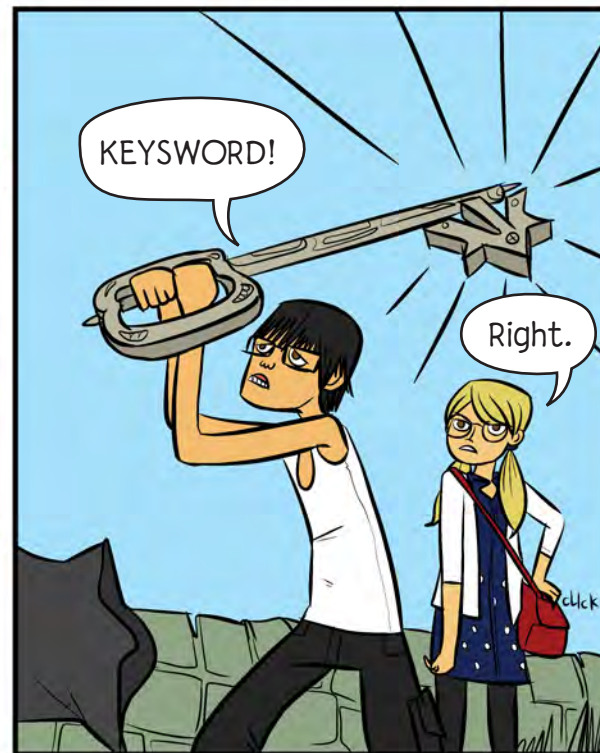


God where are they? Is that them?



What took you so long? The party started 15 minutes ago!

Tuan couldn't find his-



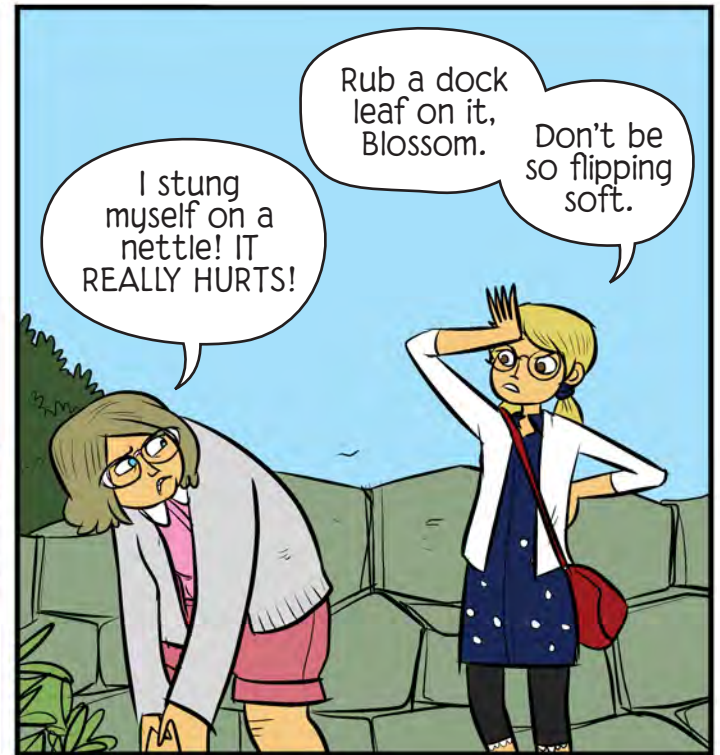
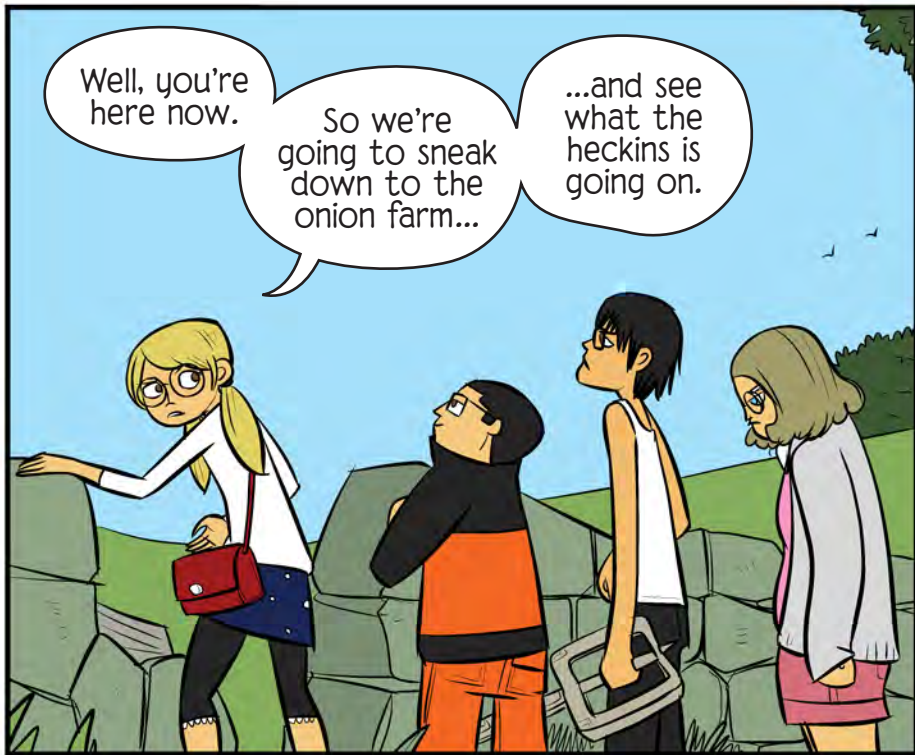
KEYWORD!

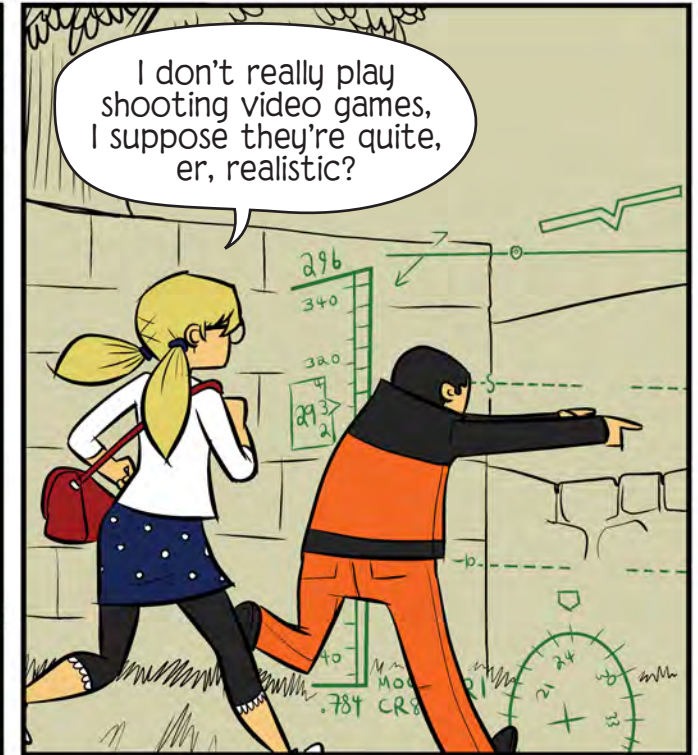
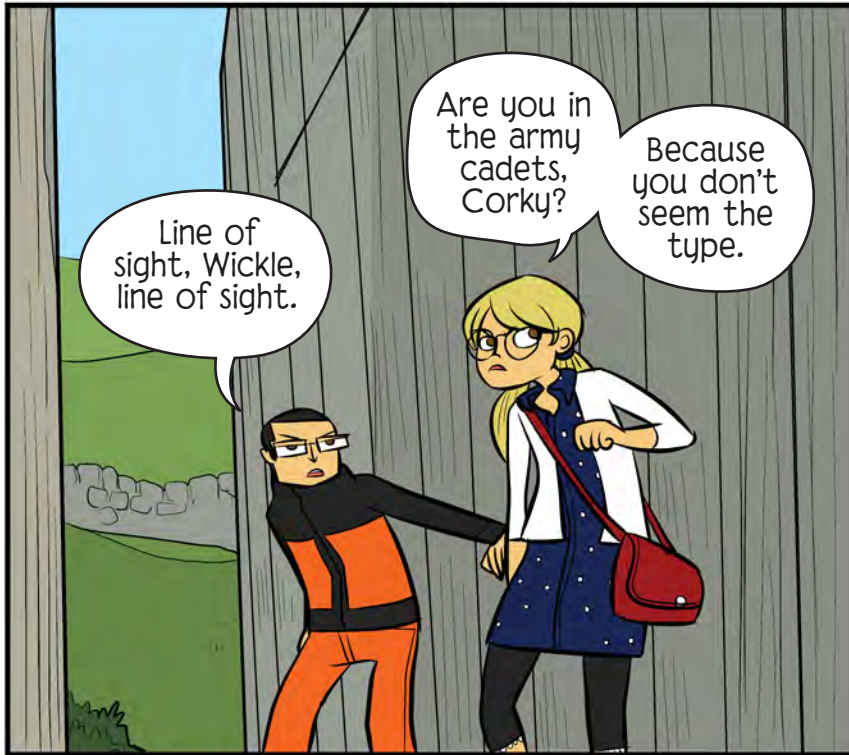
Right.



The thing about an excuse is, it's a *reason* you were late.

It's not just your lips saying words that don't mean anything.









We have to do something!  
We have to BREAK IN!

W-what?  
But I'm going to be a lawyer and-



Do you want your dates, your three hand holdings and your pash?

USE THIS BRICK!



BWONG



WHAT?

Try the front door!  
I should have said that first.



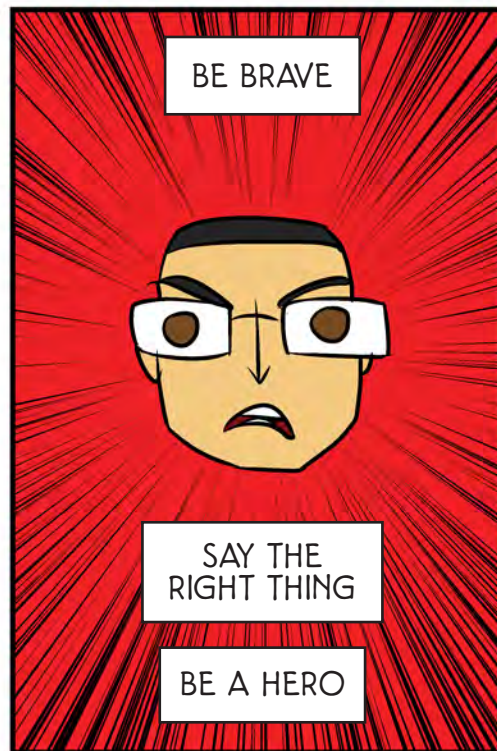
The front door won't open!  
There's not even a KEYHOLE!



These walls look like brick but they don't feel like it!

What is this place?

What do we DO?



BE BRAVE

SAY THE RIGHT THING

BE A HERO



I can stay and help until 6 o'clock but then I have to go home for my tea.

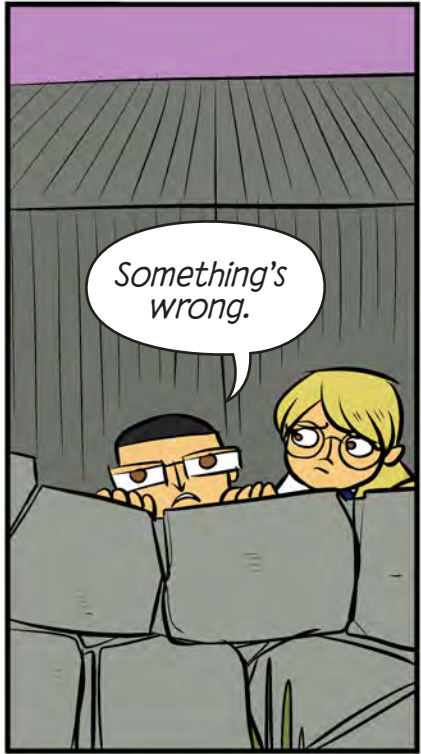


The vibrating's stopped.



They seem fine. They seem like they had a good time.

No surgical scars.



Something's wrong.



No party bags.

Maybe we're too old for party bags now.



And not everyone can afford party bags, maybe.



A mini-bag of Haribos, two lollipops and something from Claire's Accessories?

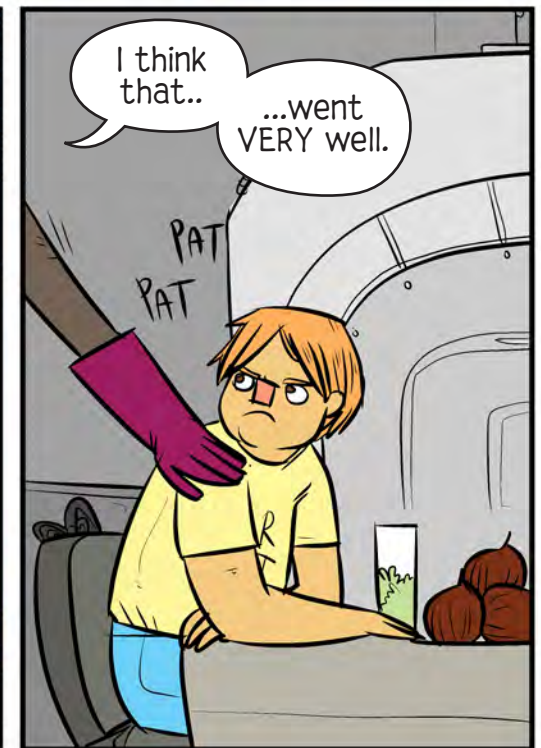
Come on.

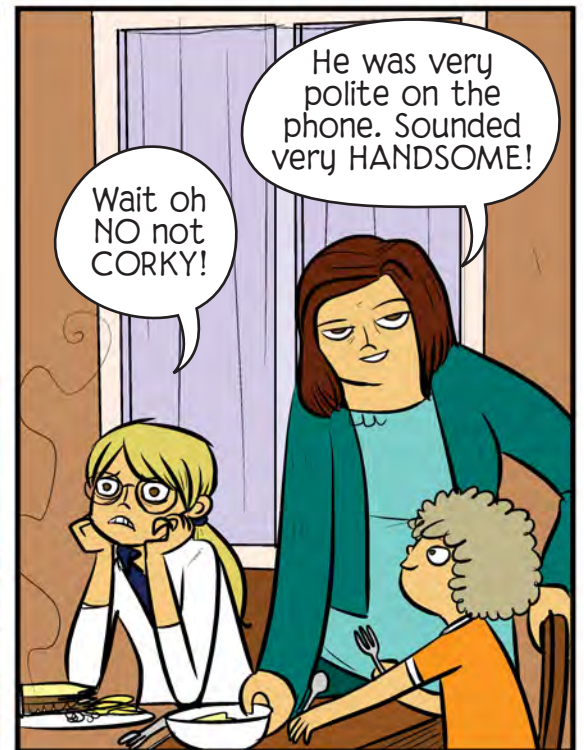
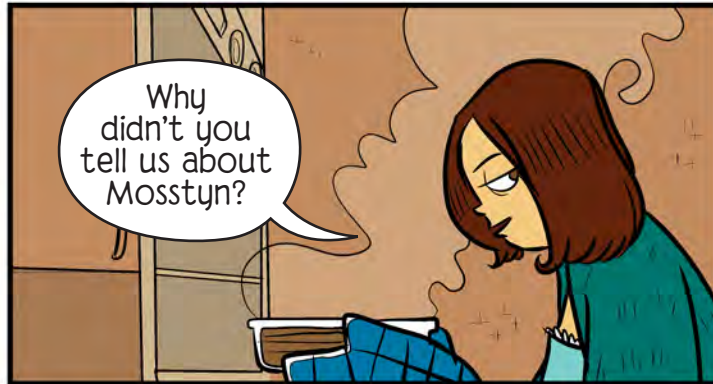


They can afford shatter-proof windows and lockless doors.

And a big thing that goes WOMMMM

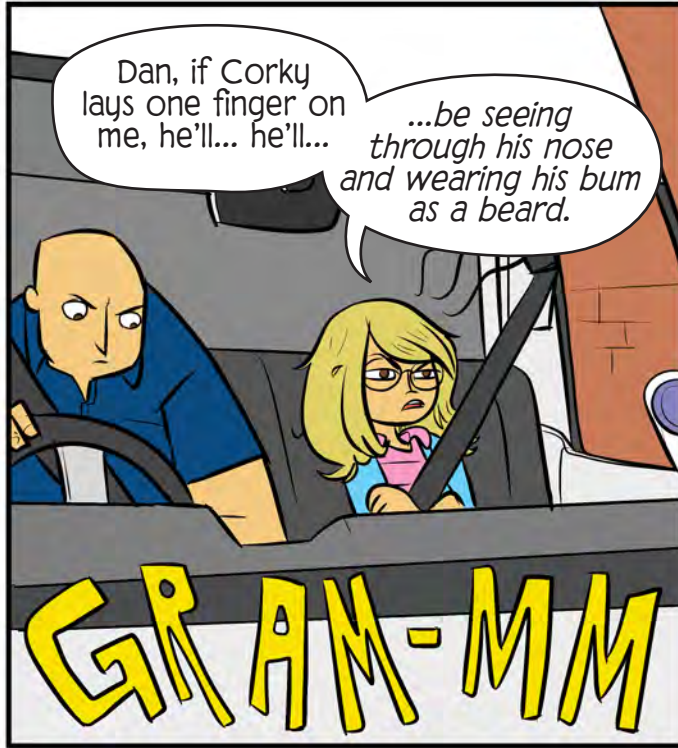
You're going to be late for your TEA.







Now since we've not met this lad, I wanted to have a word about-



Dan, if Corky lays one finger on me, he'll... he'll...

*...be seeing through his nose and wearing his bum as a beard.*

GRAM-MM



Wow Shauna, look at the size of this place!



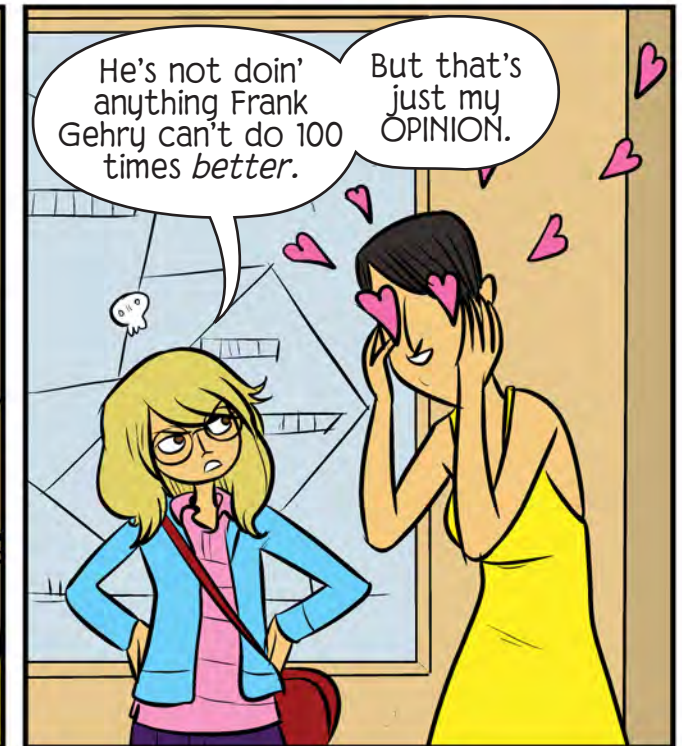
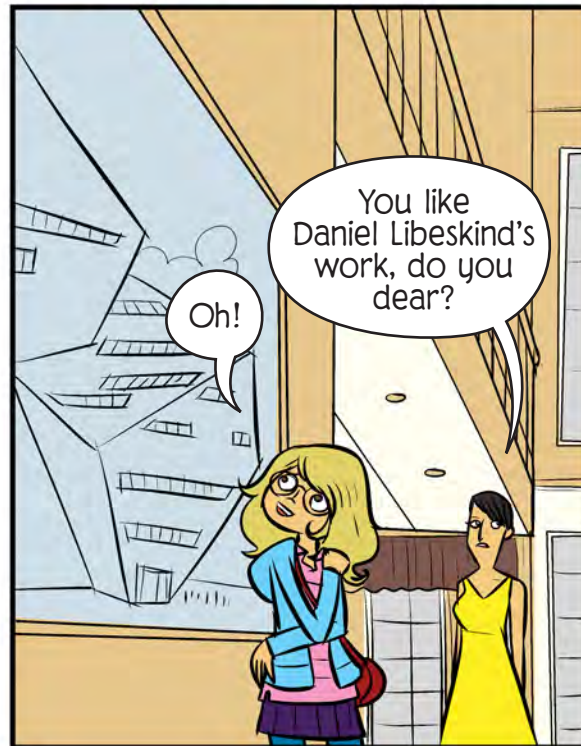
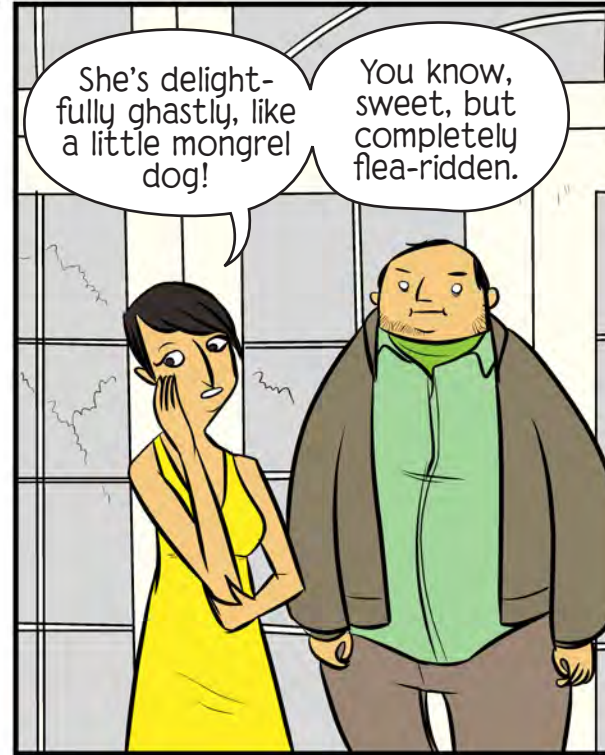
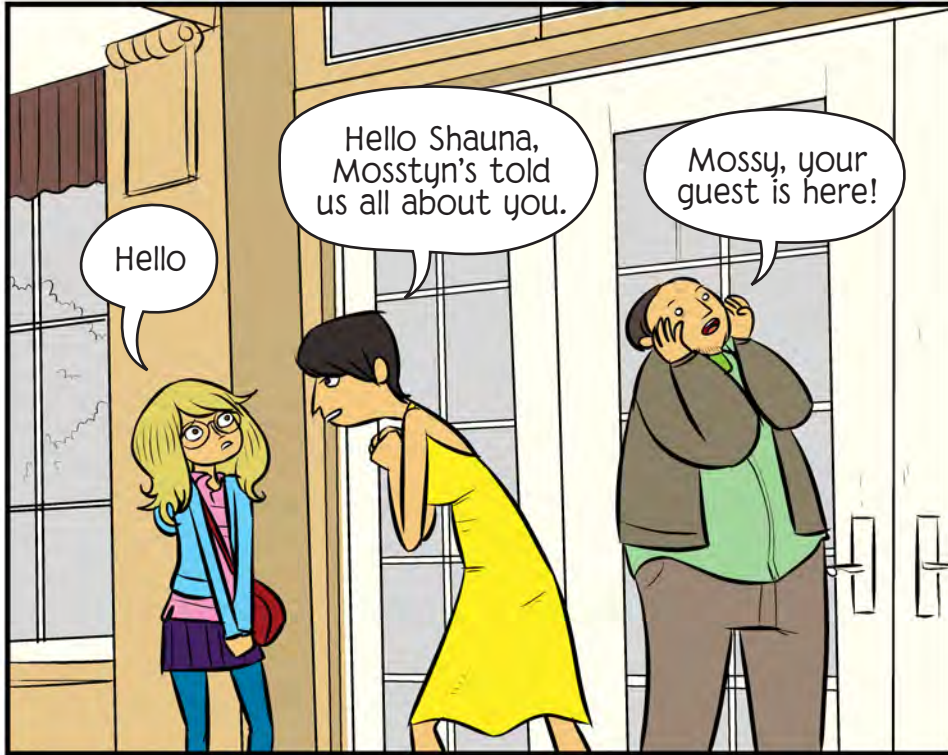
Stop doing your power glower or you won't get invited back.

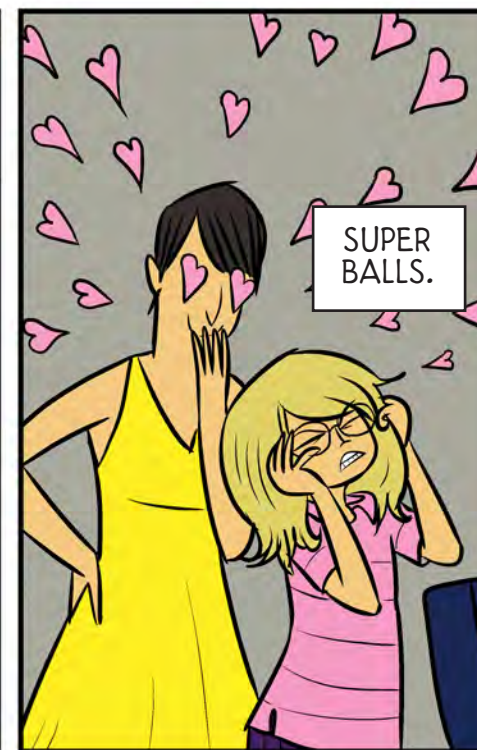
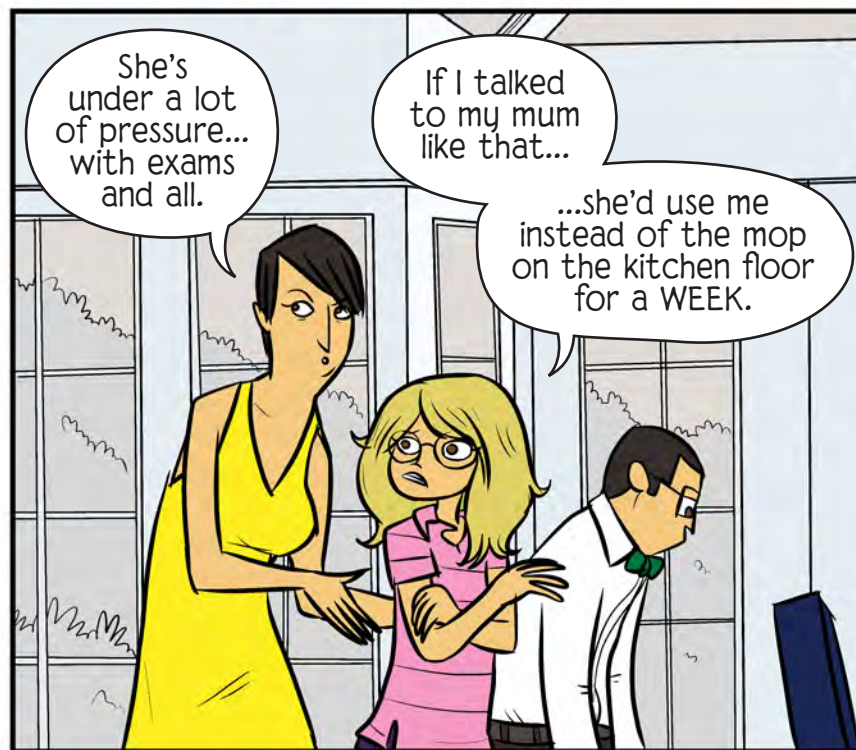
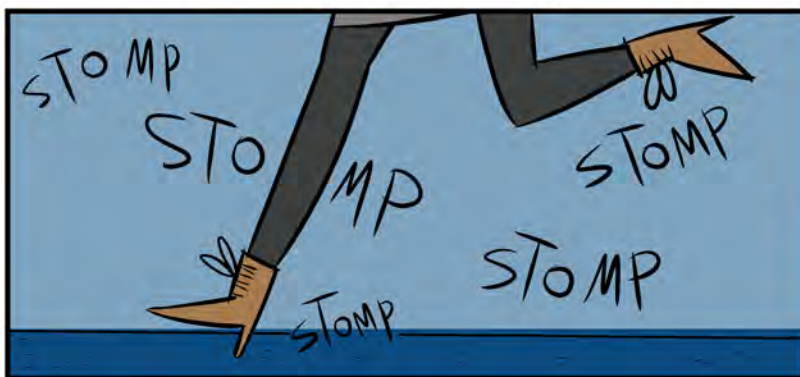
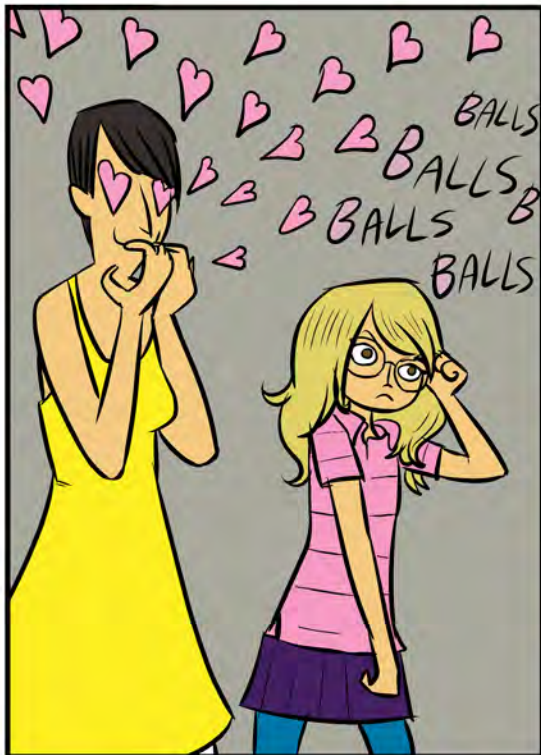
DING DING

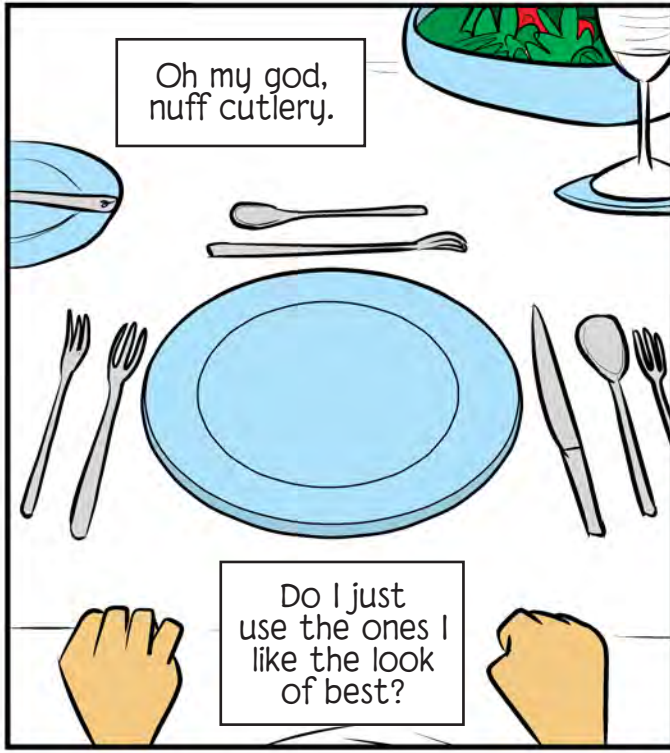


How about this?

I s'pose they'll just have to work with "dangerously feral".

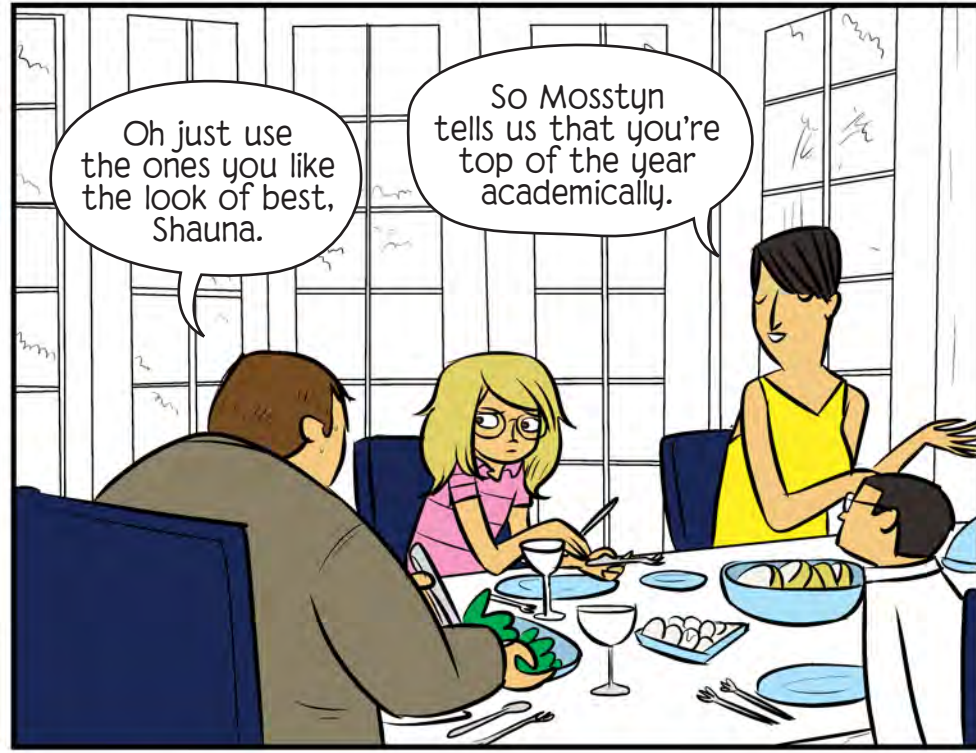






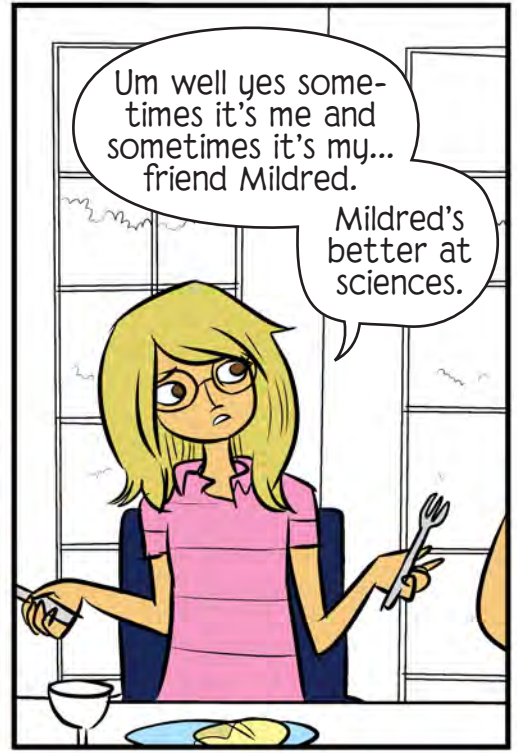
Oh my god, nuff cutlery.

Do I just use the ones I like the look of best?



Oh just use the ones you like the look of best, Shauna.

So Mosstyn tells us that you're top of the year academically.



Um well yes sometimes it's me and sometimes it's my... friend Mildred.

Mildred's better at sciences.



And you're part of the swimming team?

Well I'm just fast so I'm in the team.



Mossy, well, he struggles, don't you?

So how did you two become friendly?

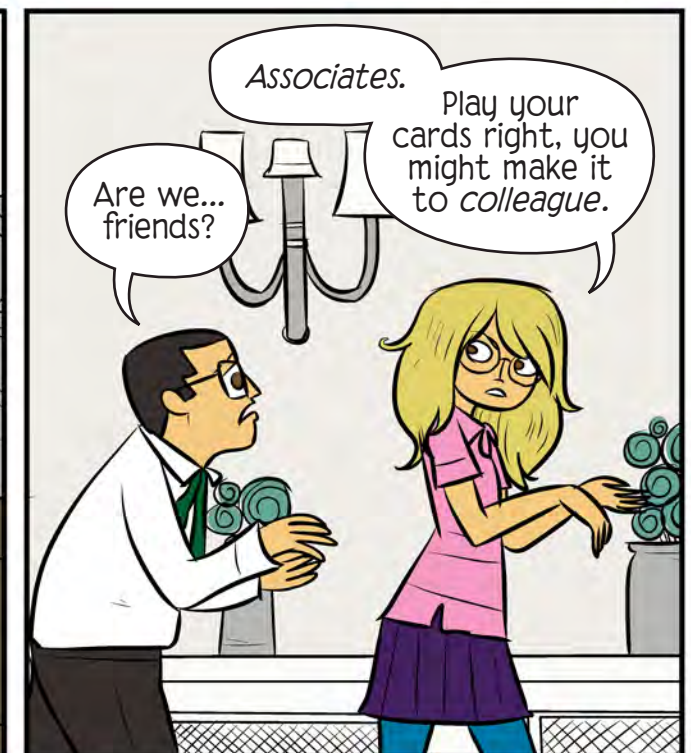
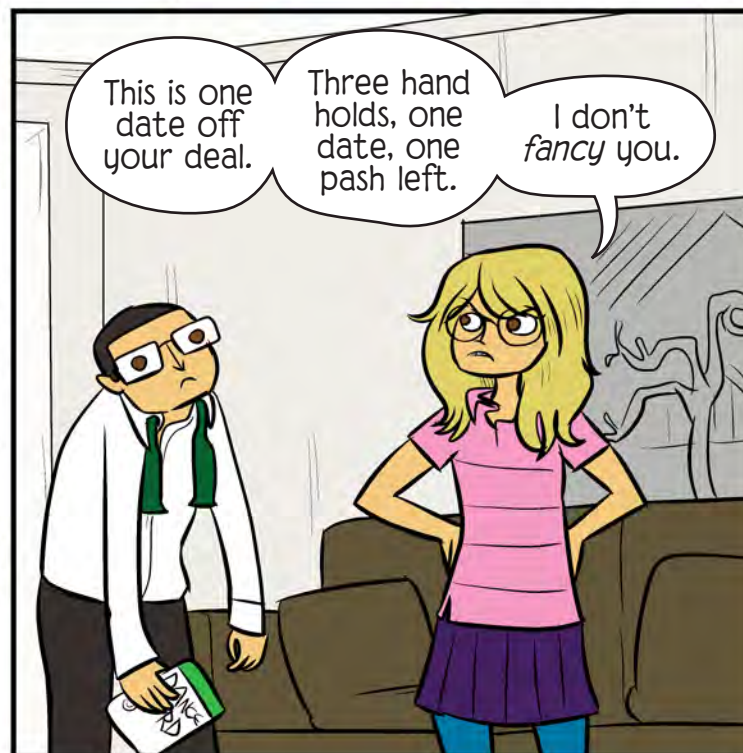


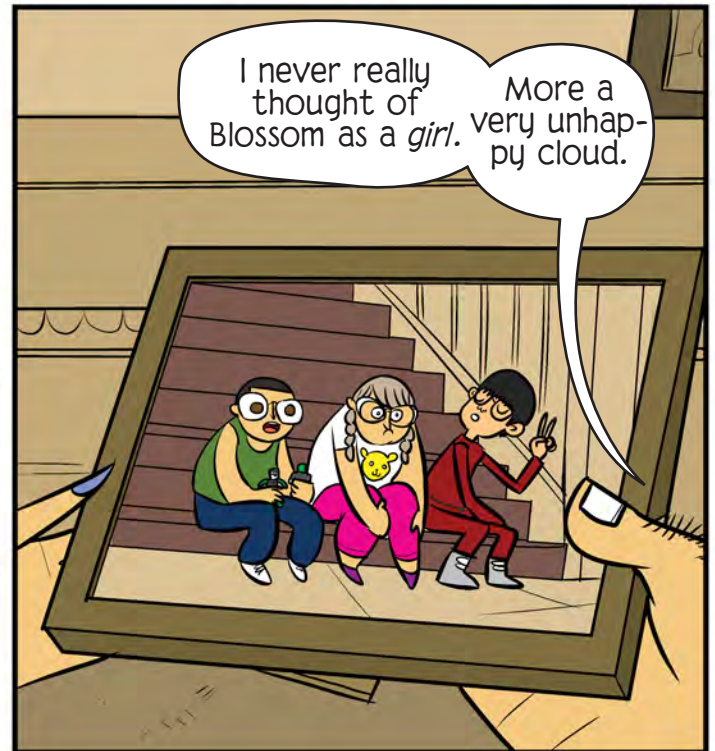
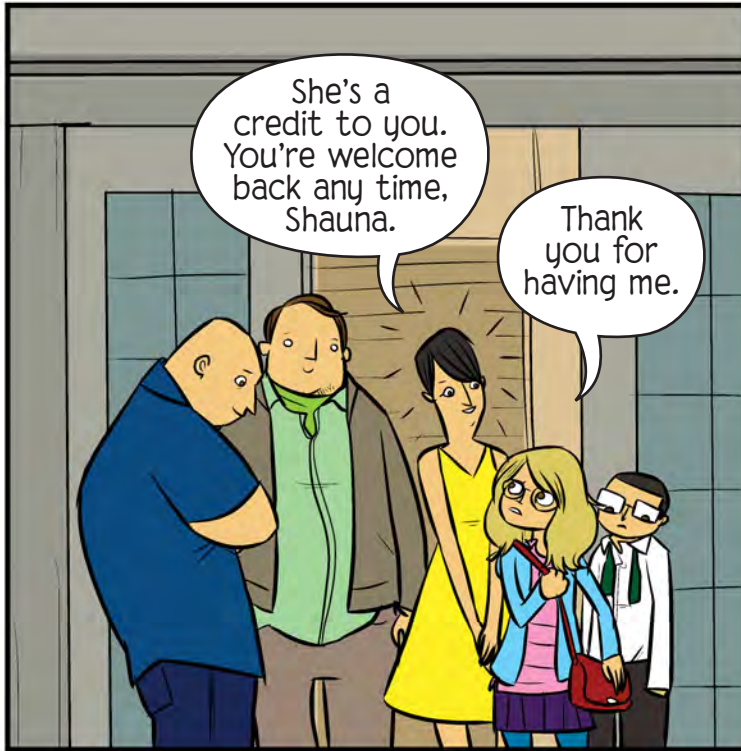
We...we..



We helped an injured bird together.

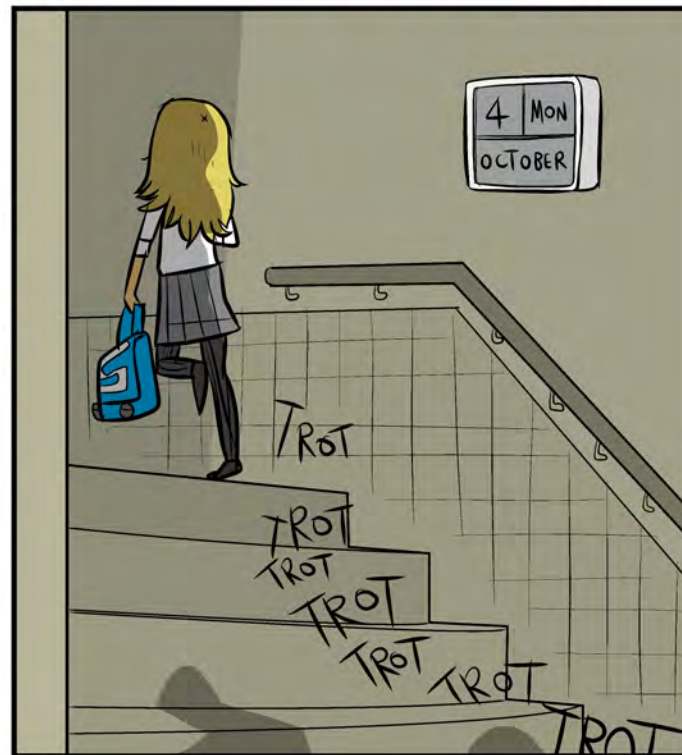
It died though.

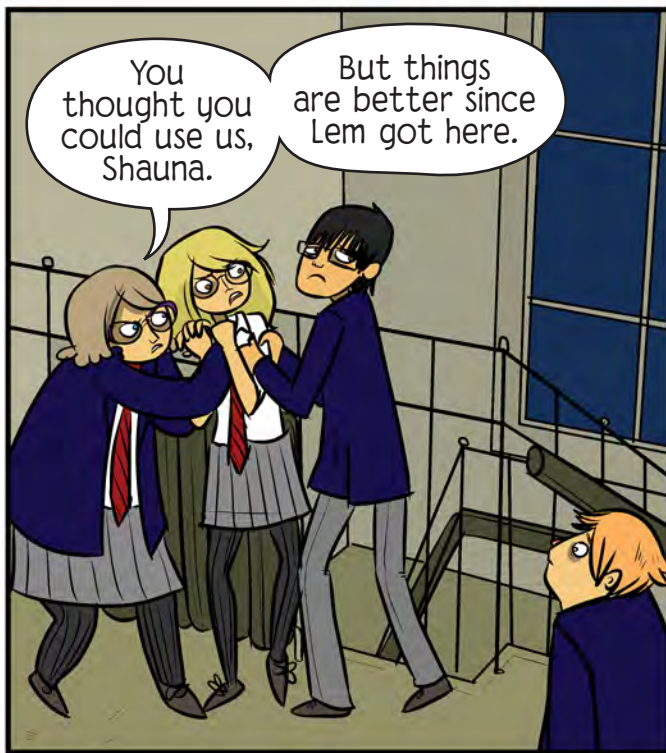
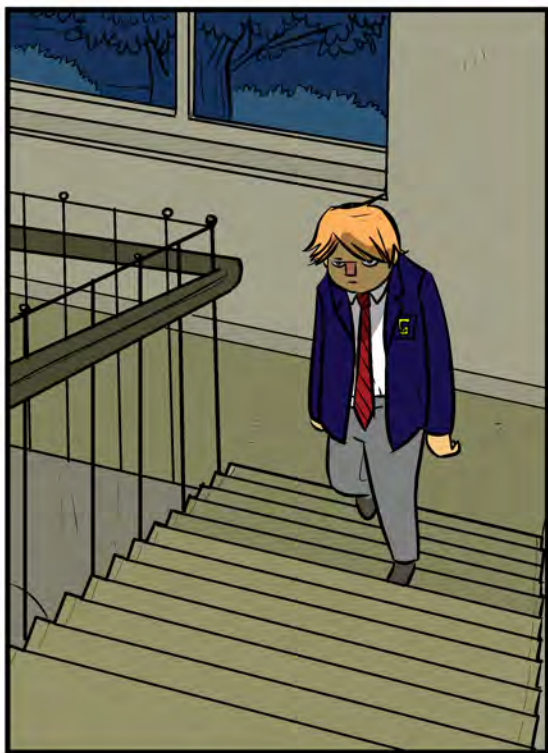
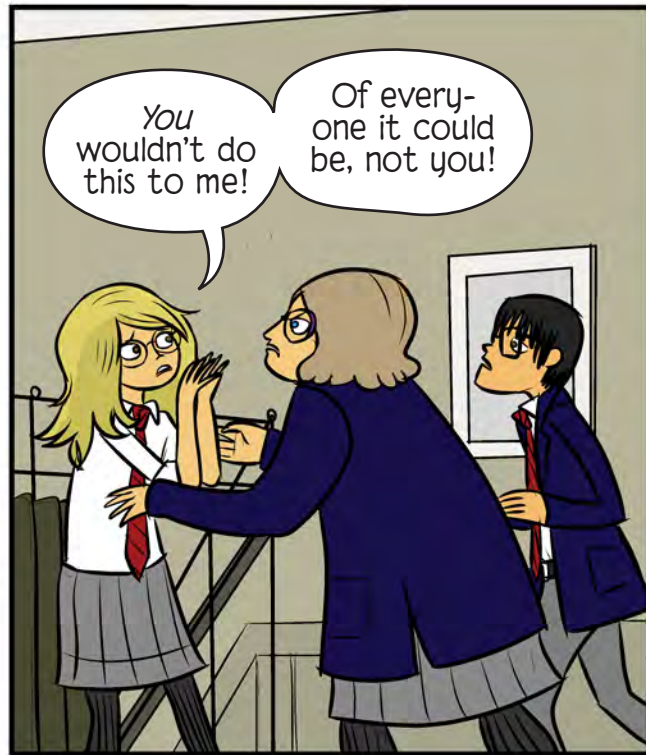


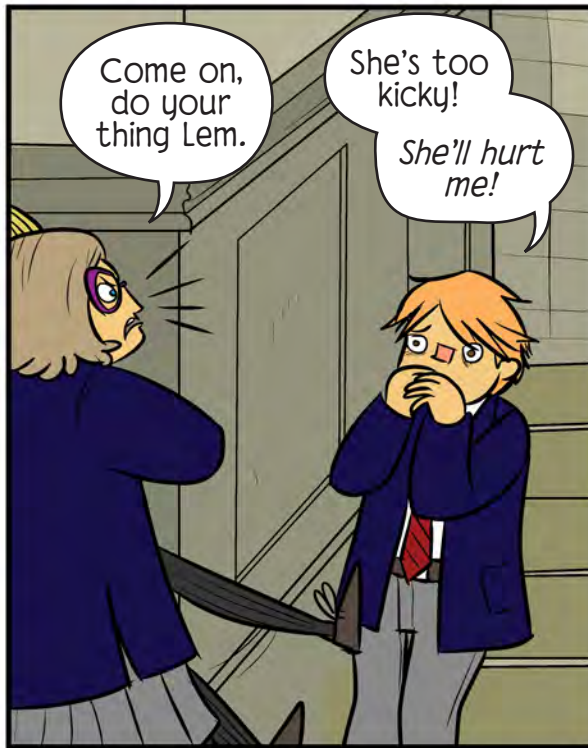
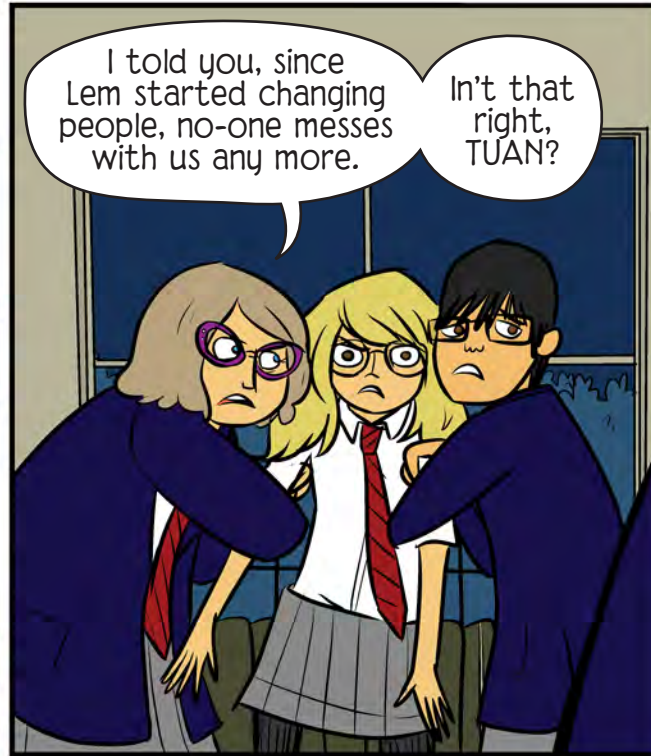
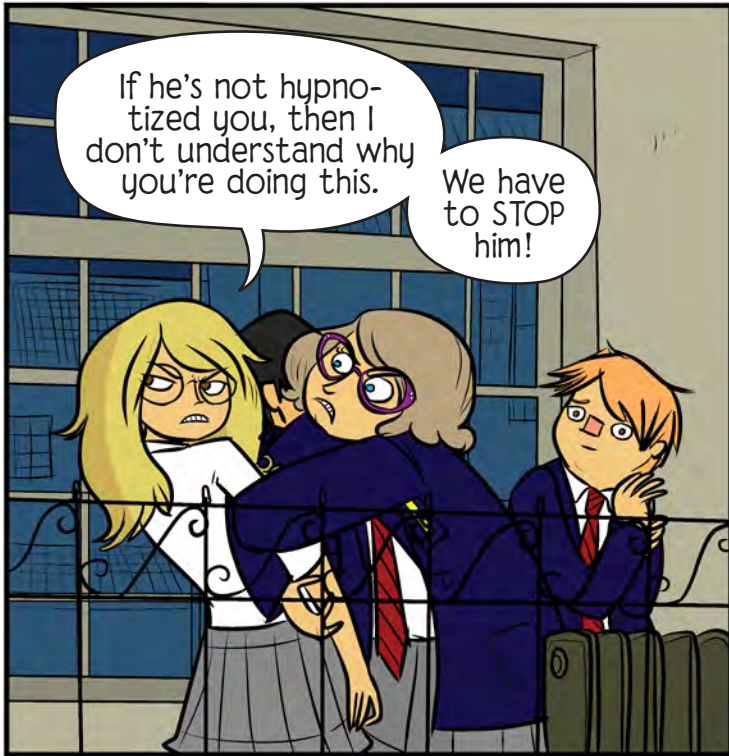


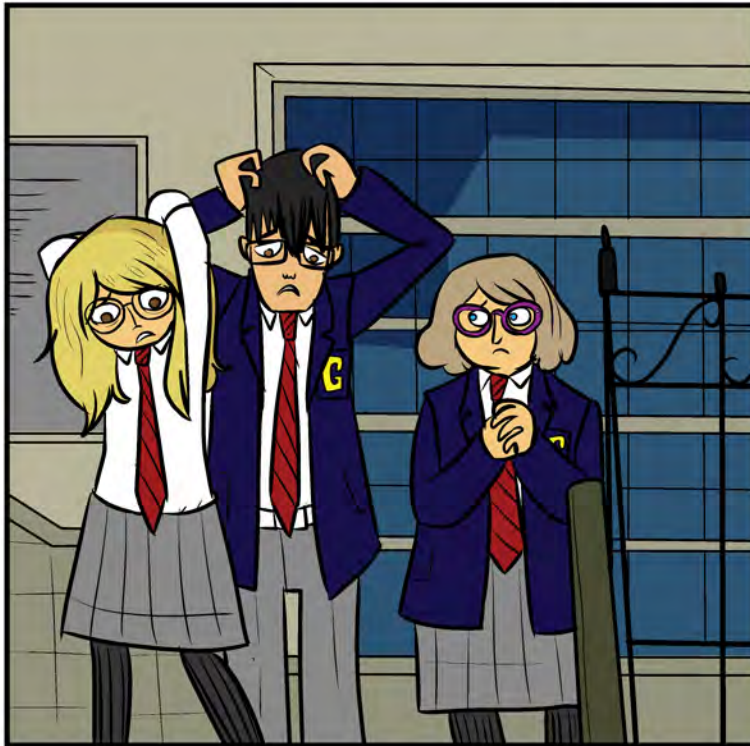
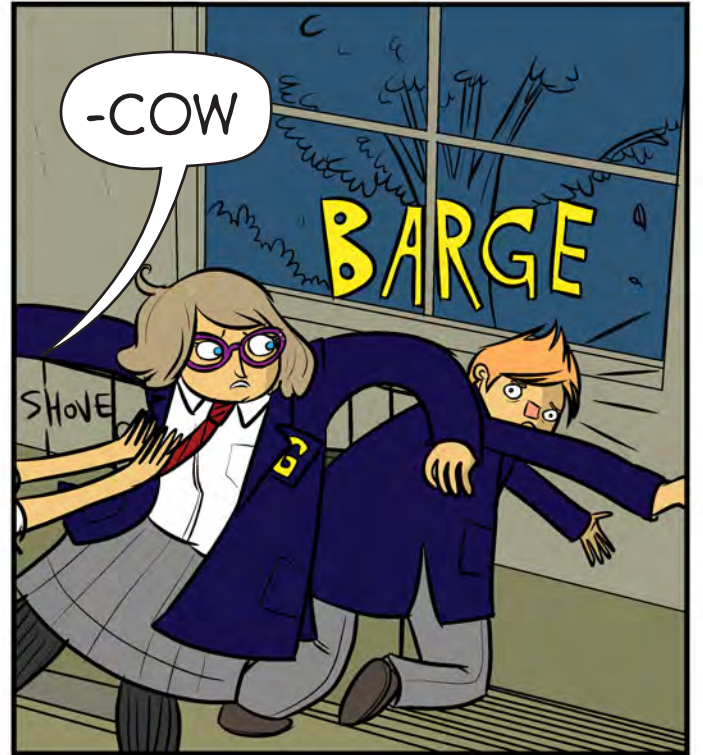
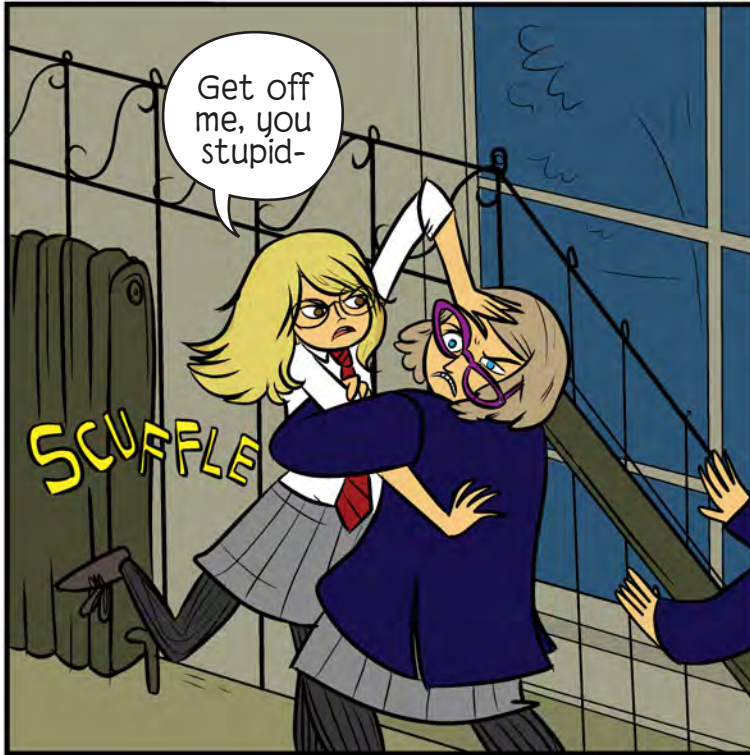
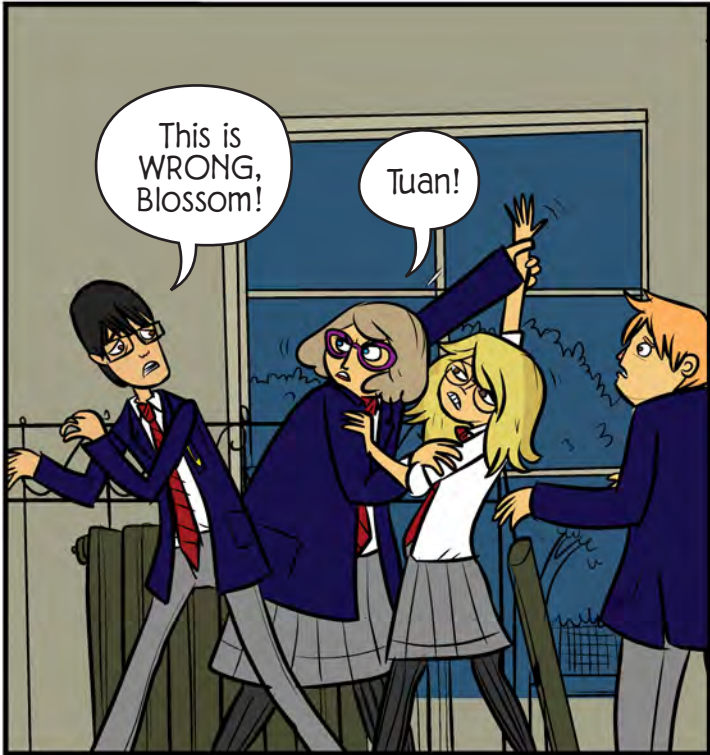


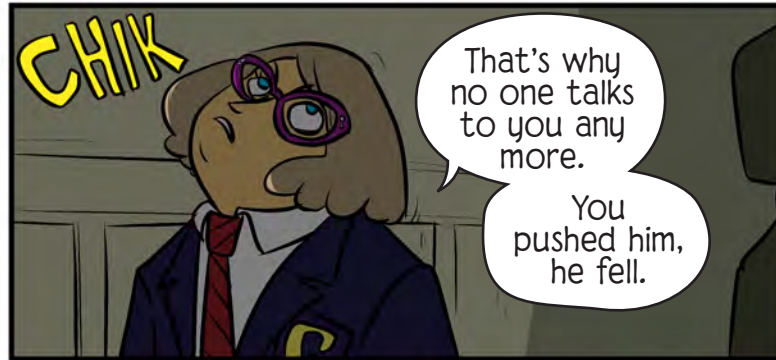
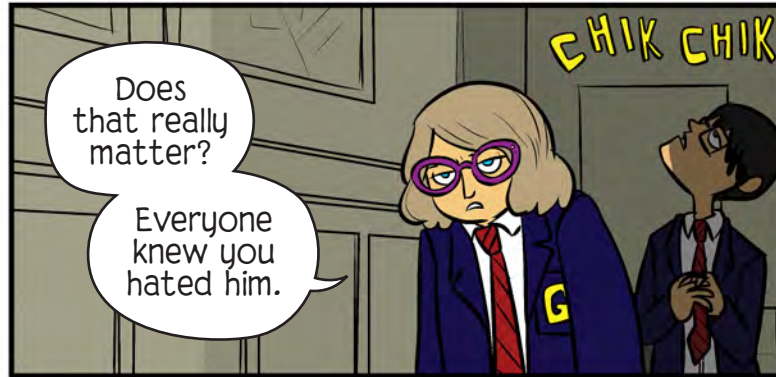














We're locked in, Tuan.

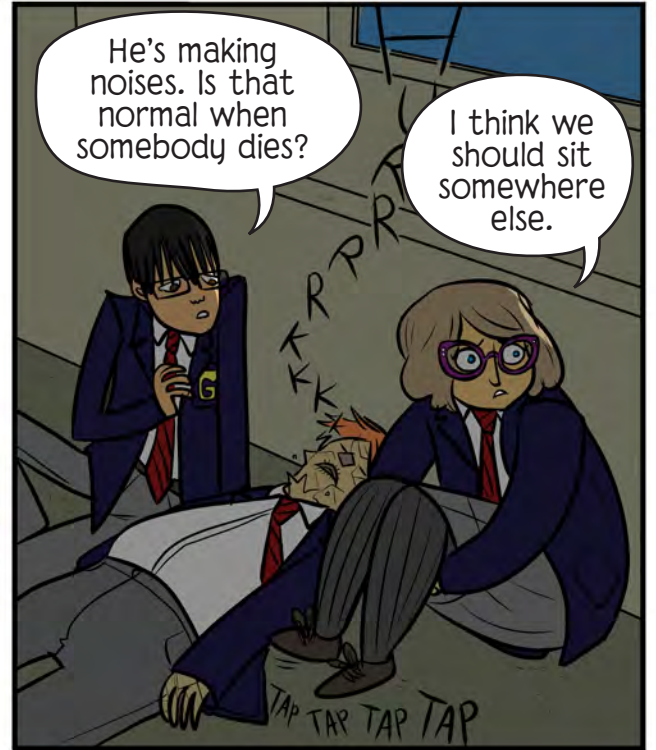
My mum and dad'll go mad.

I wish we could put the lights on.



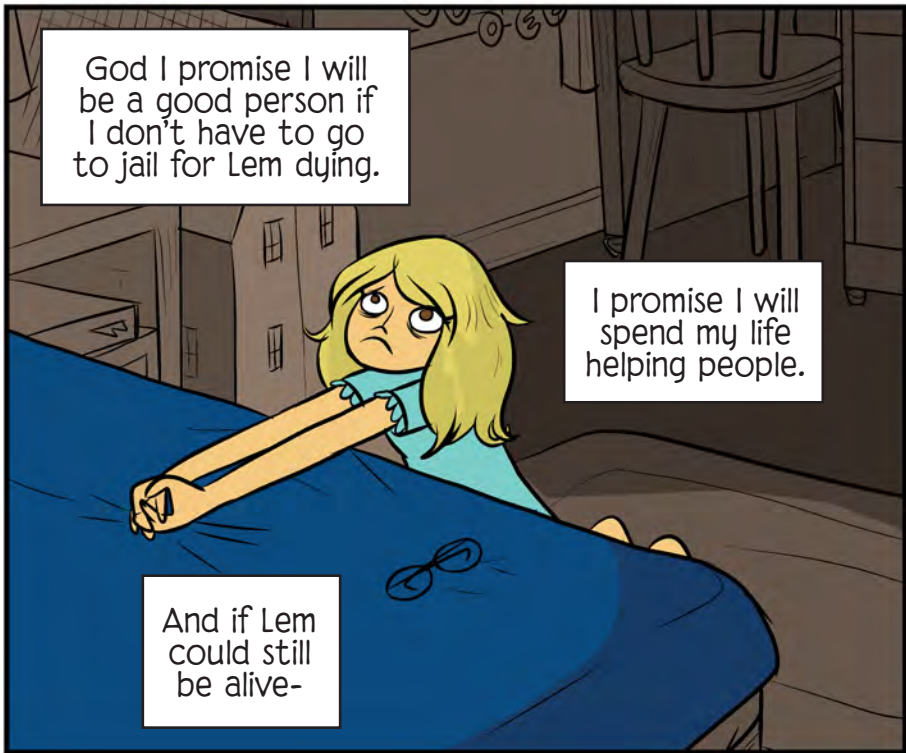
He's coming to bits. Is that normal when somebody dies?

How would I know?



He's making noises. Is that normal when somebody dies?

I think we should sit somewhere else.



God I promise I will be a good person if I don't have to go to jail for Lem dying.

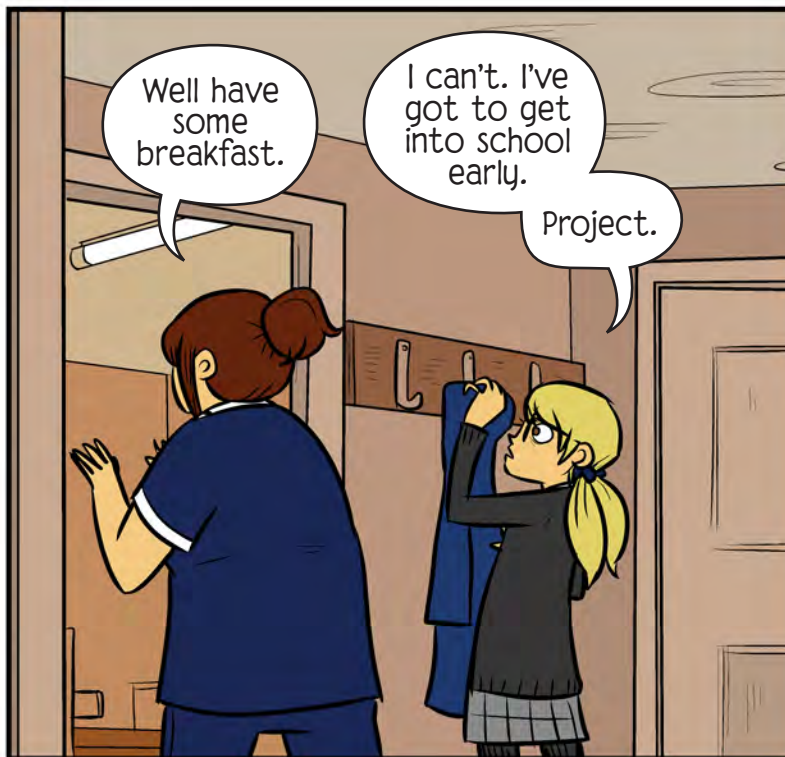
I promise I will spend my life helping people.

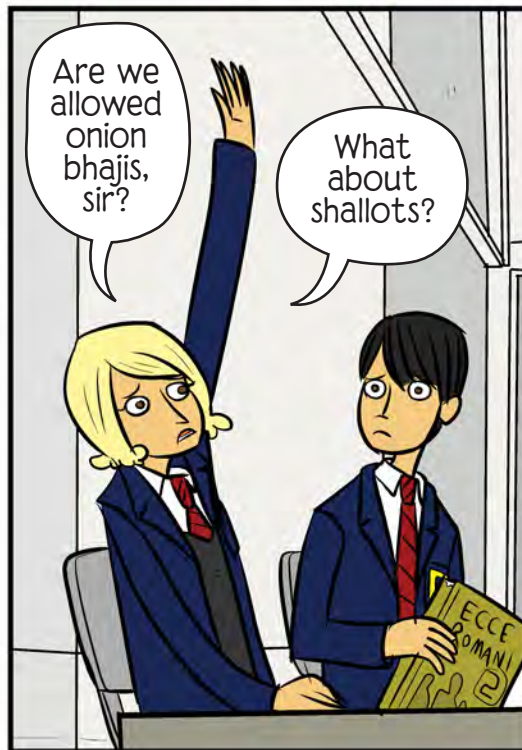
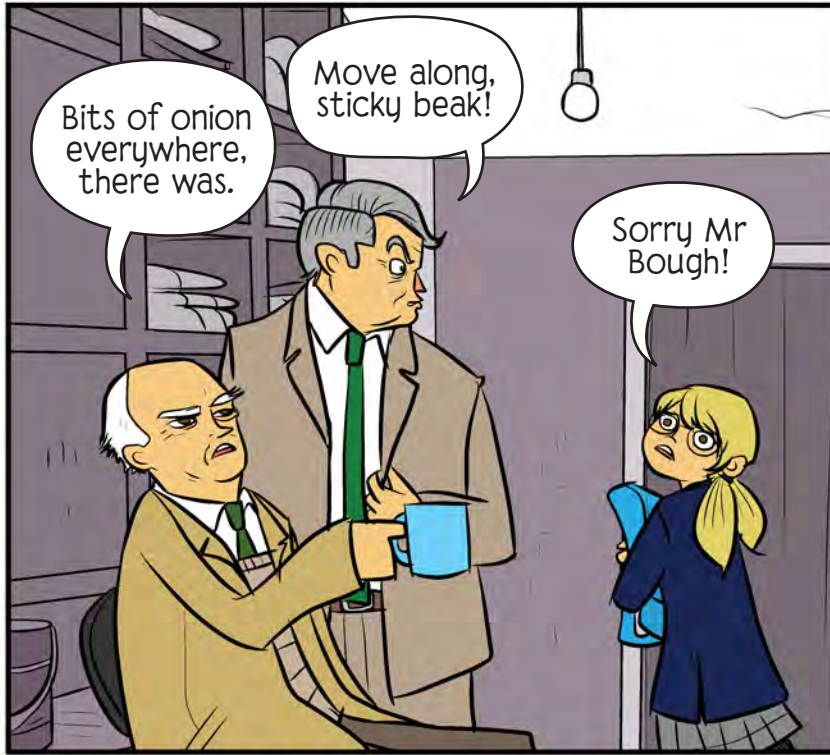
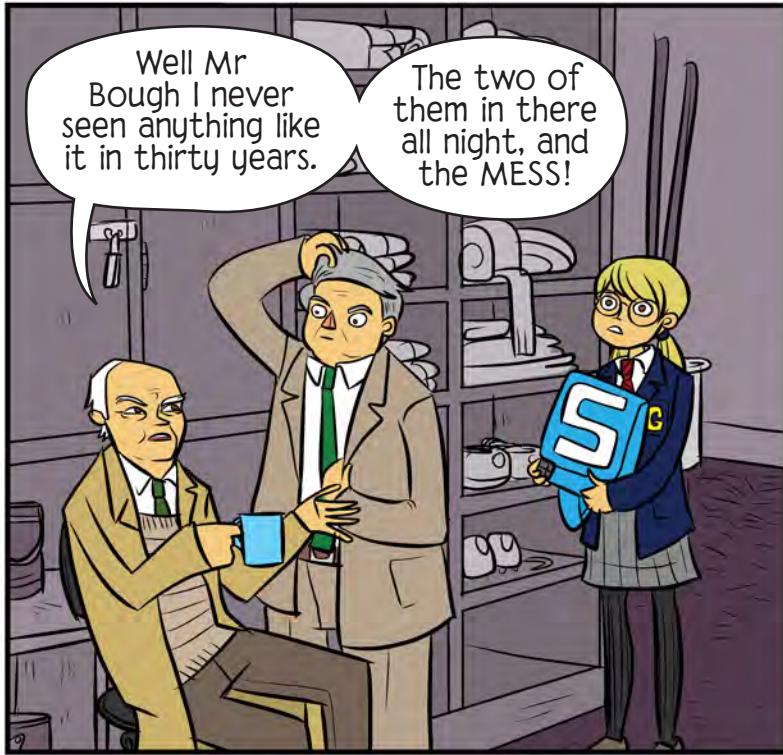
And if Lem could still be alive-



GOD PLEASE DONT LET MUM AND DAN FIND OUT IT WAS ME.

Amen.







Haversham, what's the nominative plural present participle of 'currere'?

HAVERSHAM?



Mildred



Haversham, are you making it your mission to aggravate my stomach ulcer?



What's that you're writing?

SNATCH



What is this? Experimental poetry in the style of ee cummings?

On your feet! EXPLAIN YOURSELF!



Sir I don't know sir

I don't know what this is!



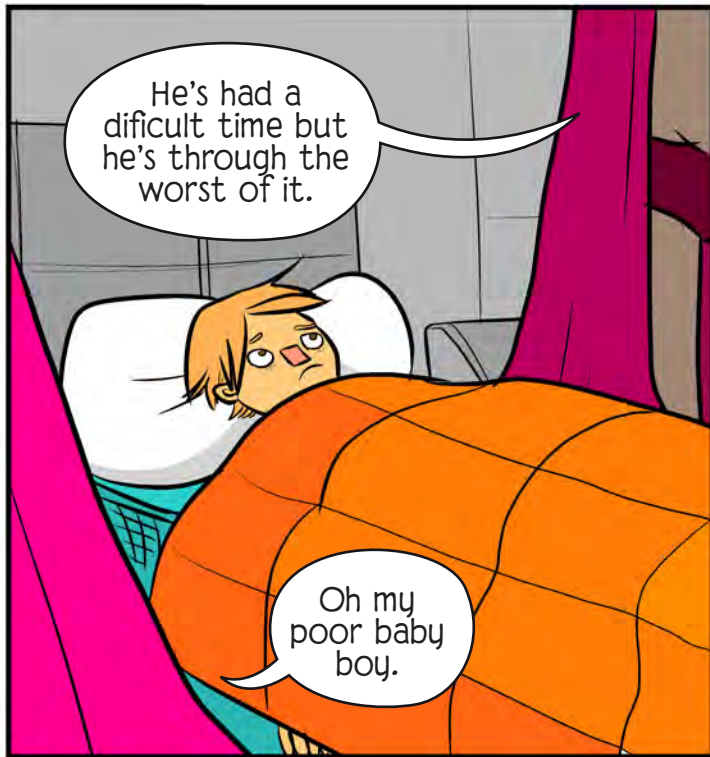
LIAR! SATURDAY DETENTION!



Currentes, currentia, sir.

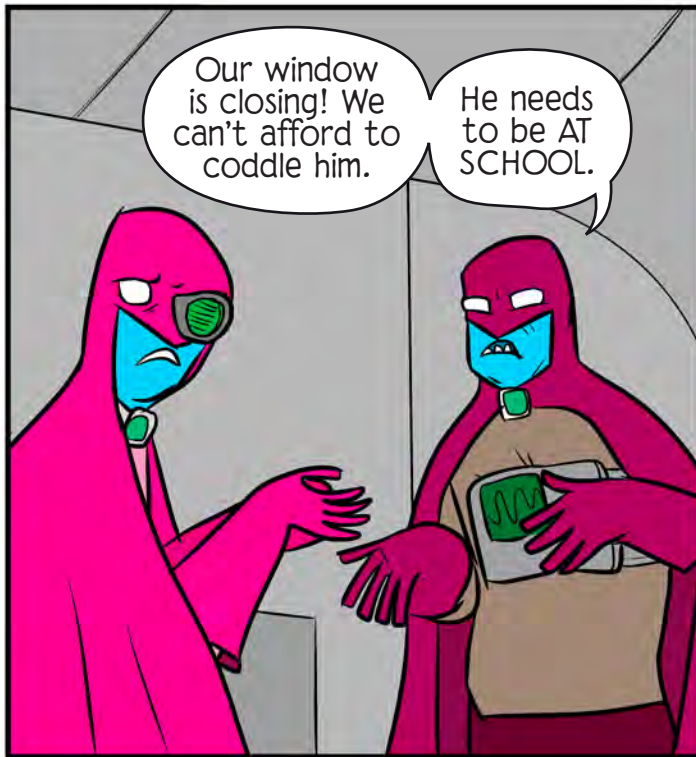
Wickle, you've restored my faith in womankind.

CRUNCH



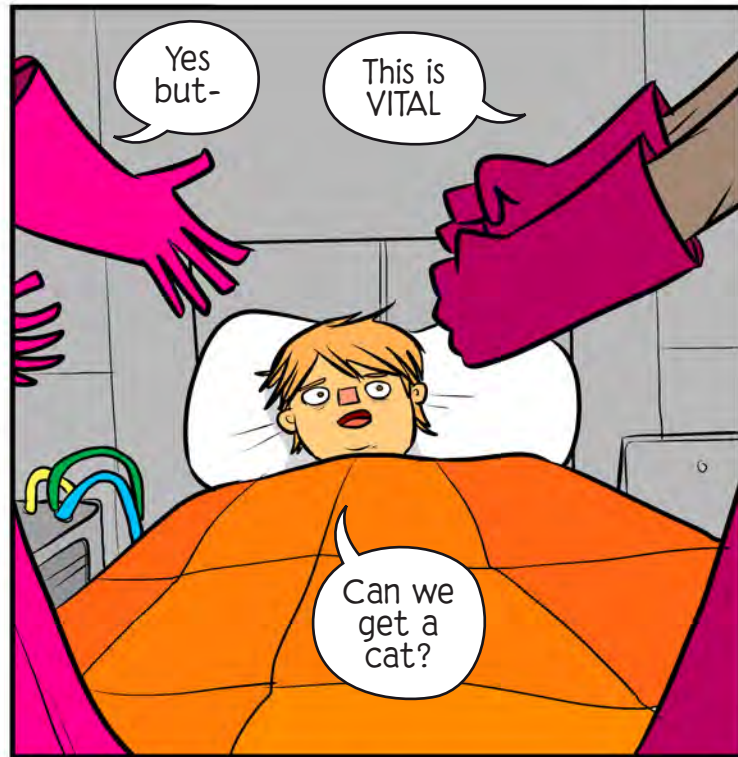
He's had a difficult time but he's through the worst of it.

Oh my poor baby boy.



Our window is closing! We can't afford to coddle him.

He needs to be AT SCHOOL.



Yes but-

This is VITAL

Can we get a cat?

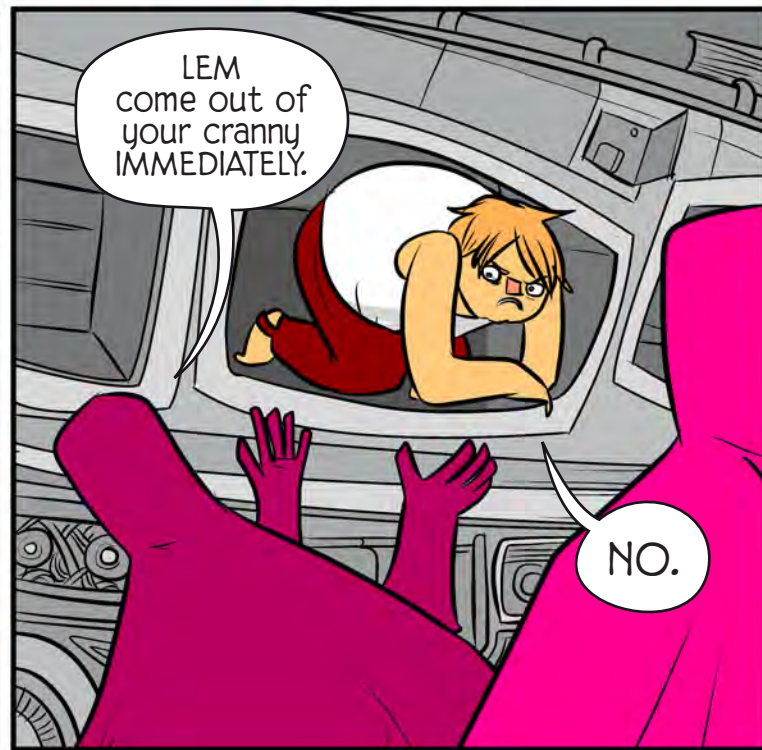


I don't feel good! I don't wanna go to school!



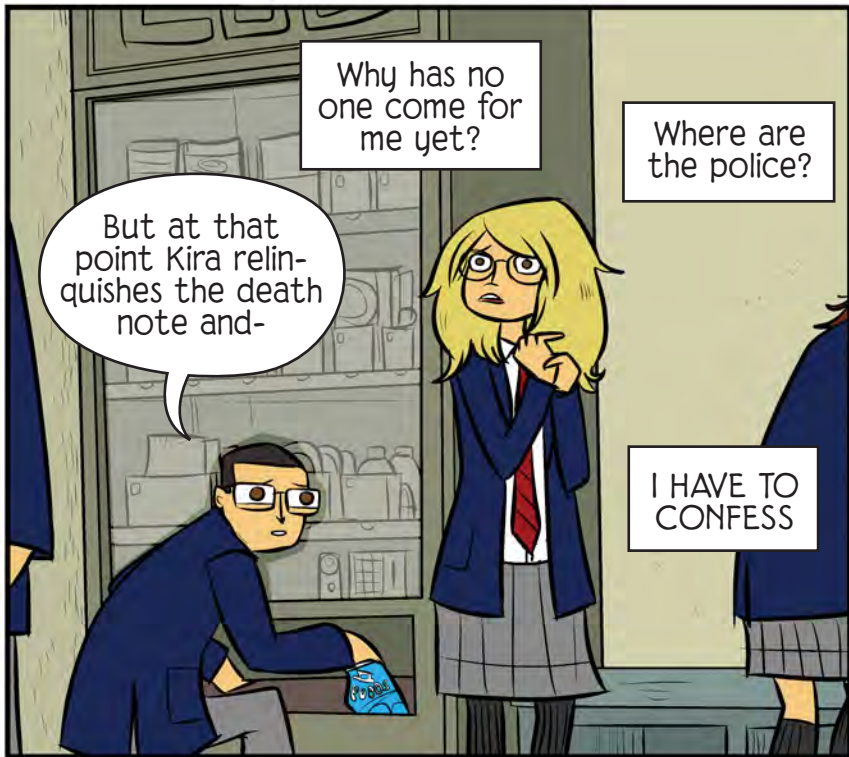
Lem we need you to bring your friends to another party. Just one more.

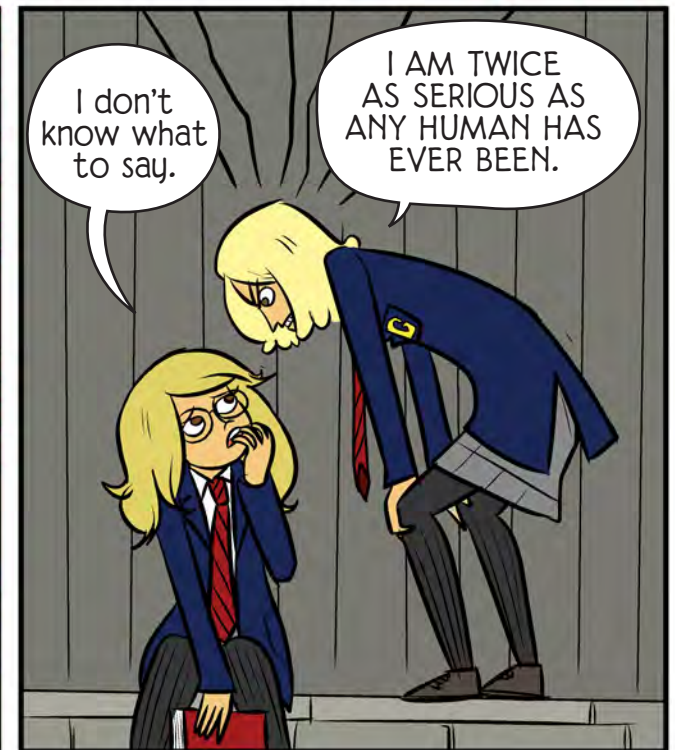
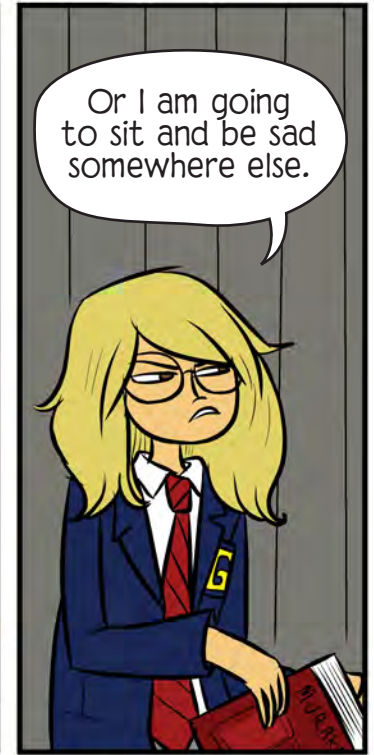
Then we can go home.

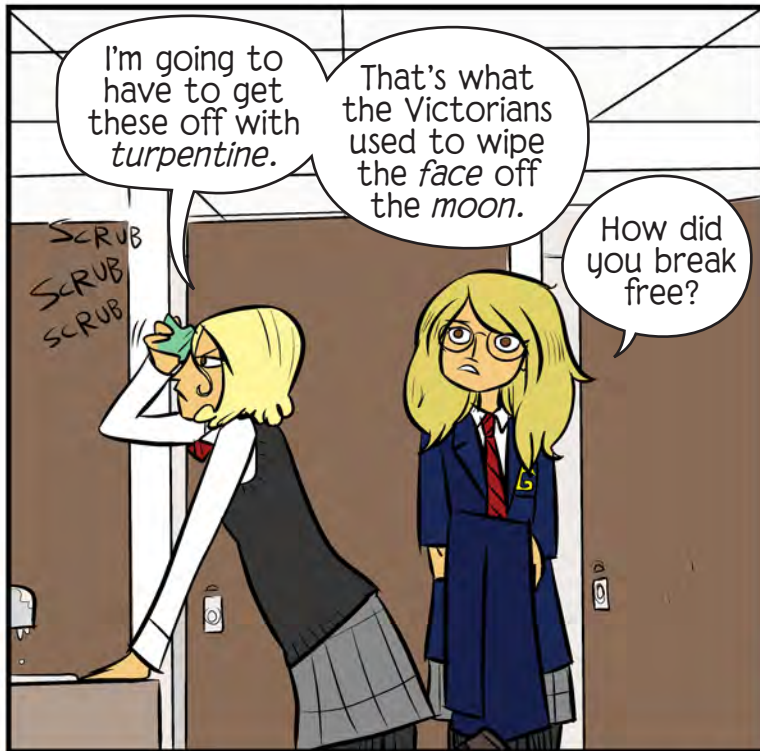


LEM come out of your cranny IMMEDIATELY.

NO.







I'm going to have to get these off with turpentine.

That's what the Victorians used to wipe the face off the moon.

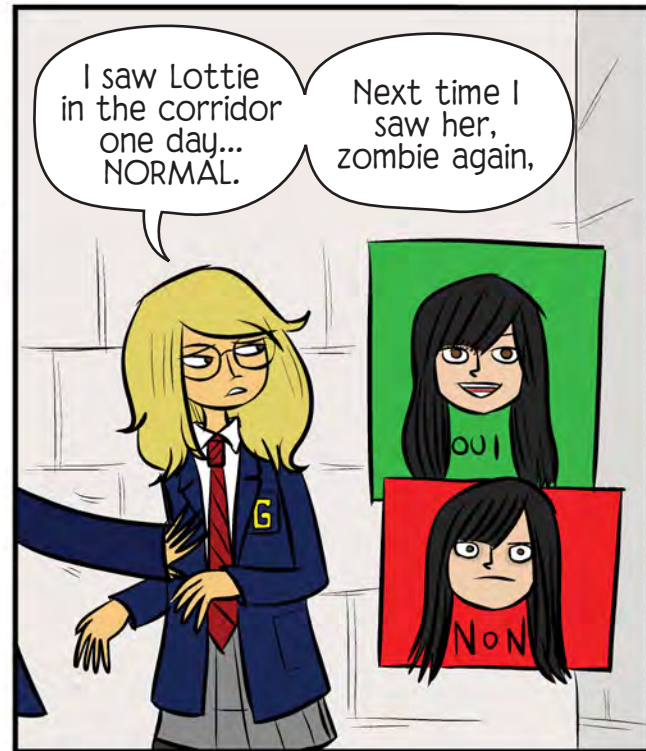
How did you break free?



I don't know! Beaky gave me that big telling off in Latin.

THE SHAME OF IT

And suddenly you were the old you again?



I saw Lottie in the corridor one day... NORMAL.

Next time I saw her, zombie again,



Wait, was it the day Lem gave out his party invitations?

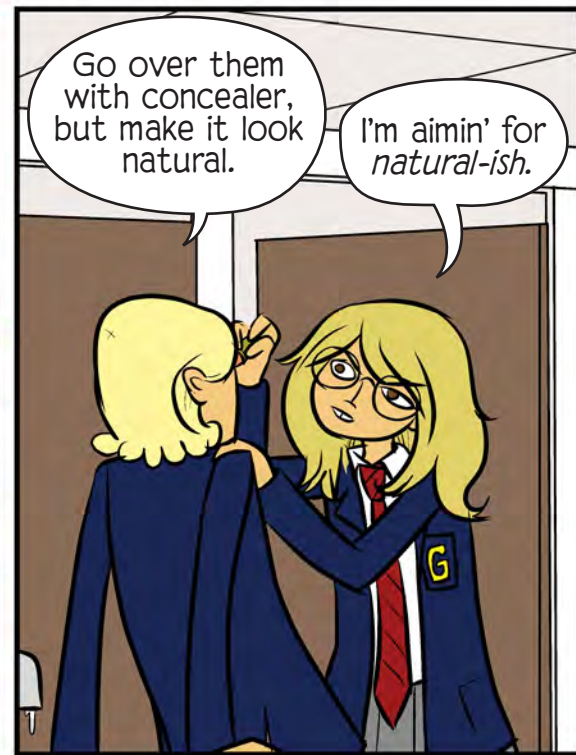
She stood on a table and sang a mad song that day with music only she could hear.



Everyone just stared. She was WELL embarrassed. *Mortified!*

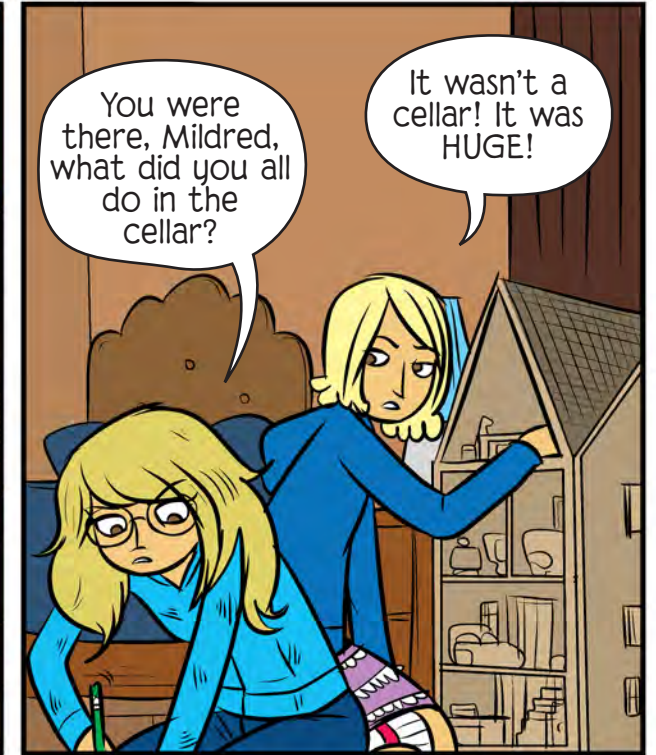


EMBARRASSMENT BREAKS LEM'S SPELL!



Go over them with concealer, but make it look natural.

I'm aimin' for *natural-ish*.

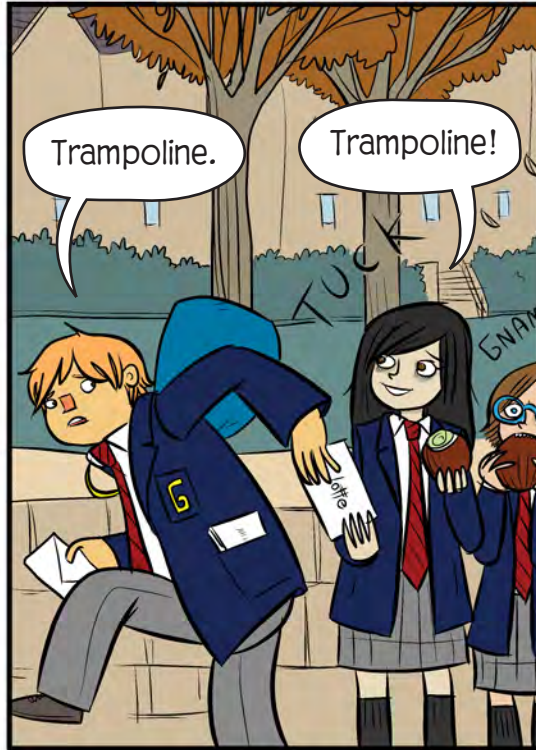




Party at mine on Saturday, we've just got a trampoline.

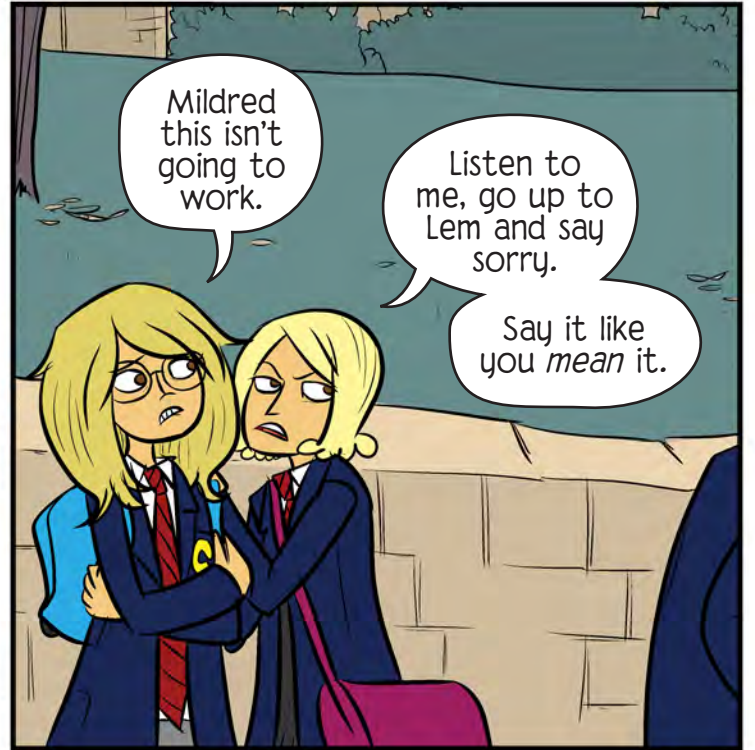


Party at mine. Trampoline.



Trampoline.

Trampoline!



Mildred this isn't going to work.

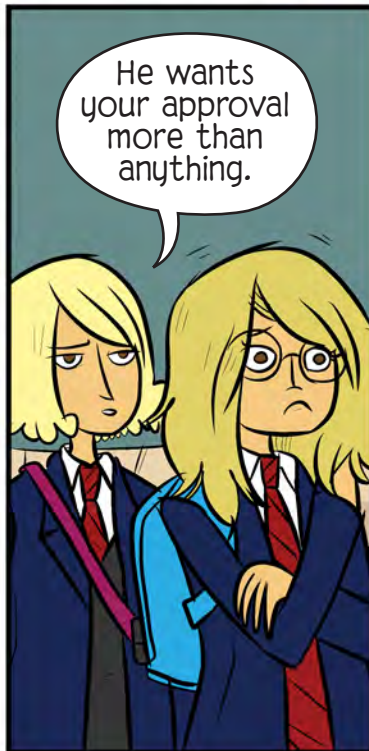
Listen to me, go up to Lem and say sorry.

Say it like you mean it.

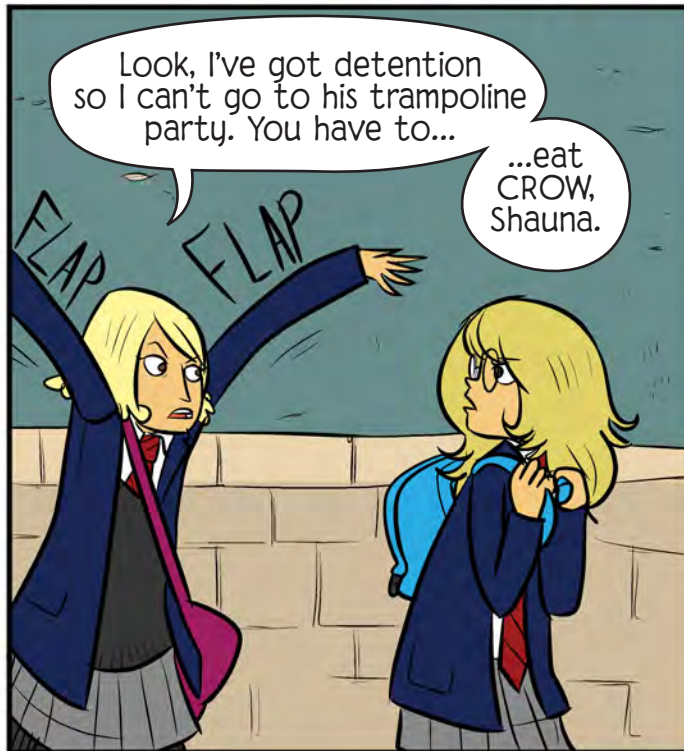


All he wants is to fit in. He wants REAL friends.

But he's SCARED of me!

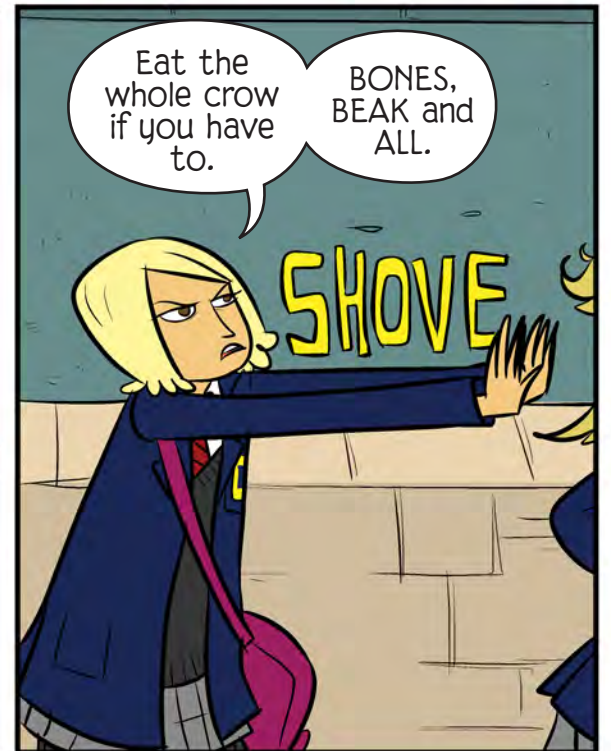


He wants your approval more than anything.



Look, I've got detention so I can't go to his trampoline party. You have to...

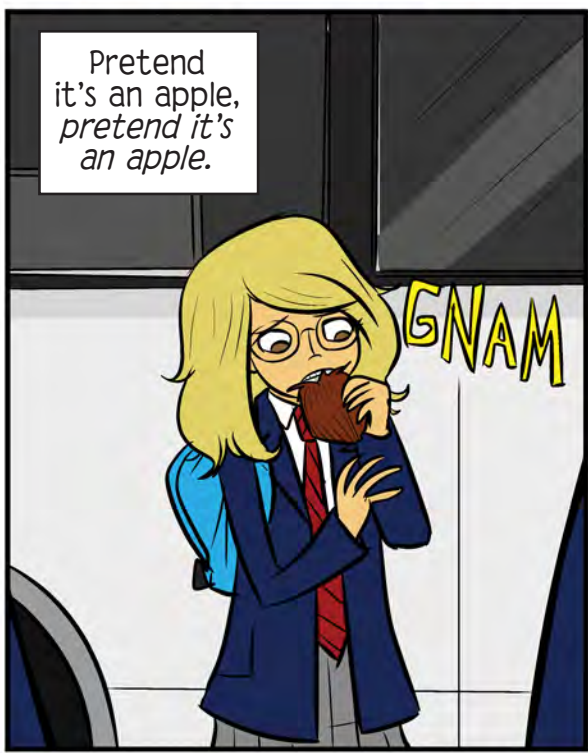
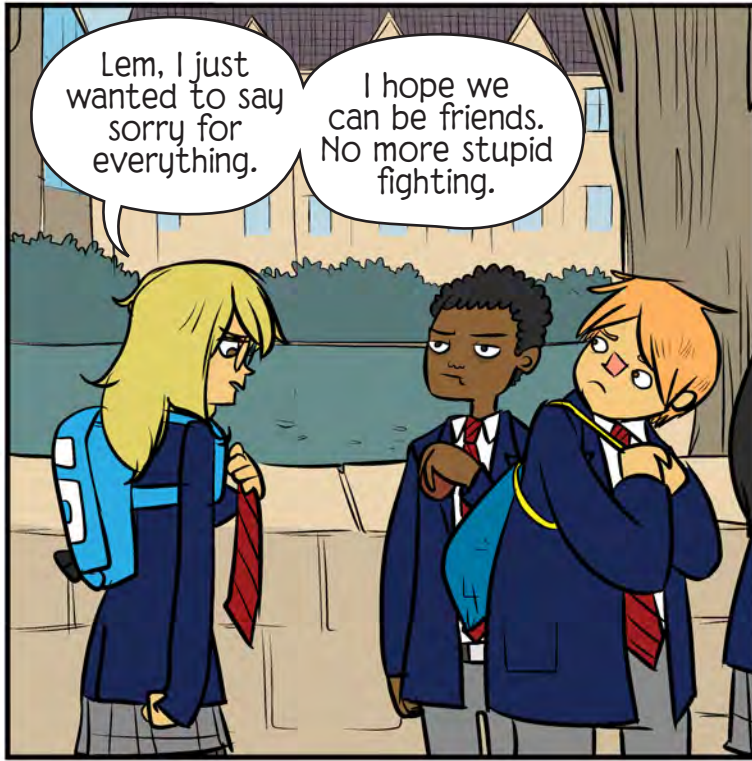
...eat CROW, Shauna.



Eat the whole crow if you have to.

BONES, BEAK and ALL.

SHOVE

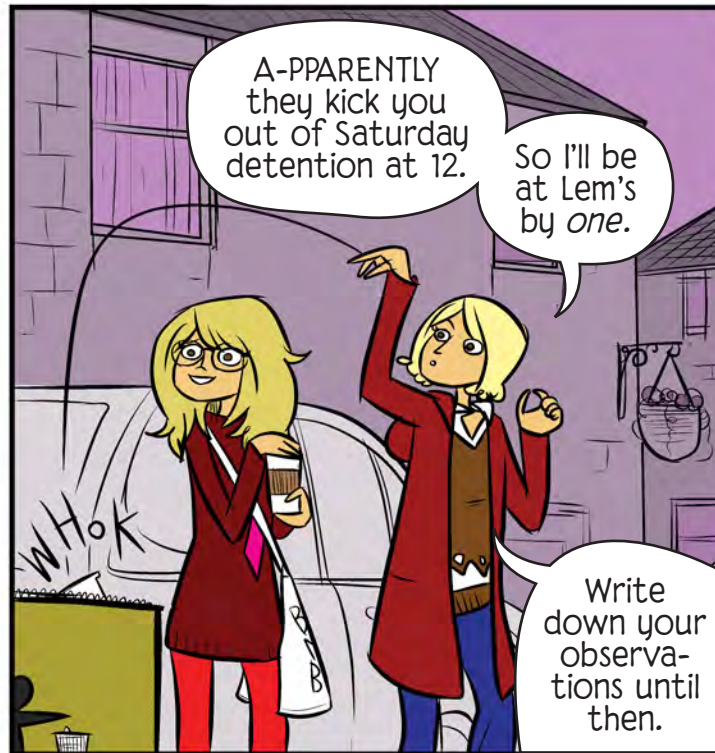




Is your coffee working?

I'm feeling quite jangly.

8.50! I have to get a move on!



A-PPARENTLY they kick you out of Saturday detention at 12.

So I'll be at Lem's by one.

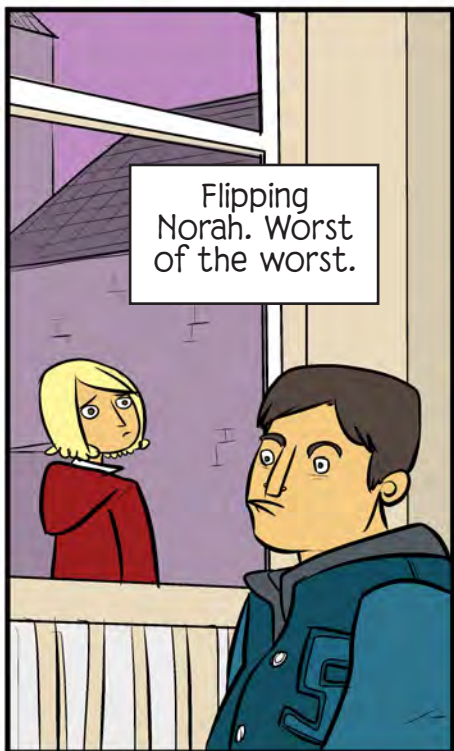
Write down your observations until then.



I'm scared Mildred!

Me too! Satto detto is full of school's most hardened criminals.

I've got to live through that to get down to how scared you are.



Flipping Norah. Worst of the worst.



Filled someone's bag with lab gas.



Sold her mum's ciggies in the loos at break.

POLDERS



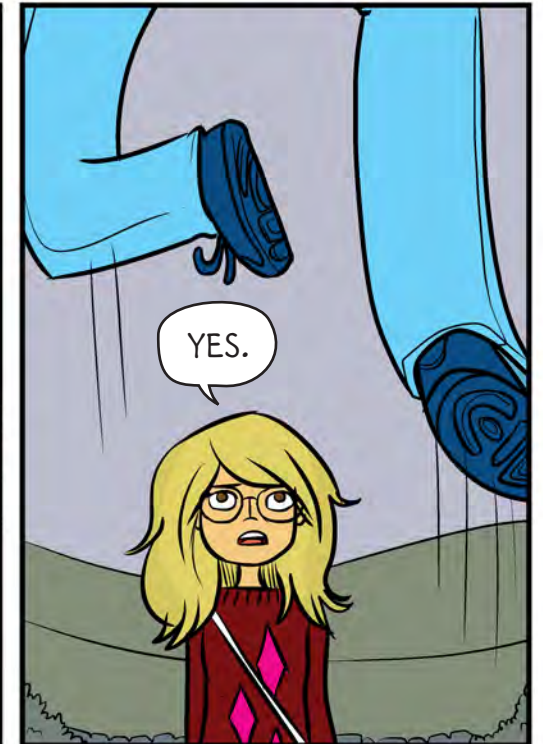
Drew a willy on the bonnet of Mr Peebles' new car.



Hid in an organ pipe, no one knows why.



I think your work is really groundbreaking!





Come on in, Shauna.



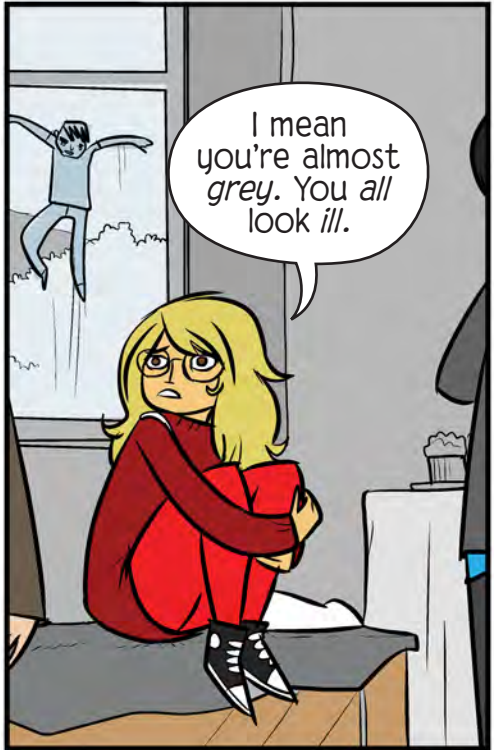
You look... terrible, Lottie.

HEY WHAT my sister got me this t-shirt in BROOKLYN.

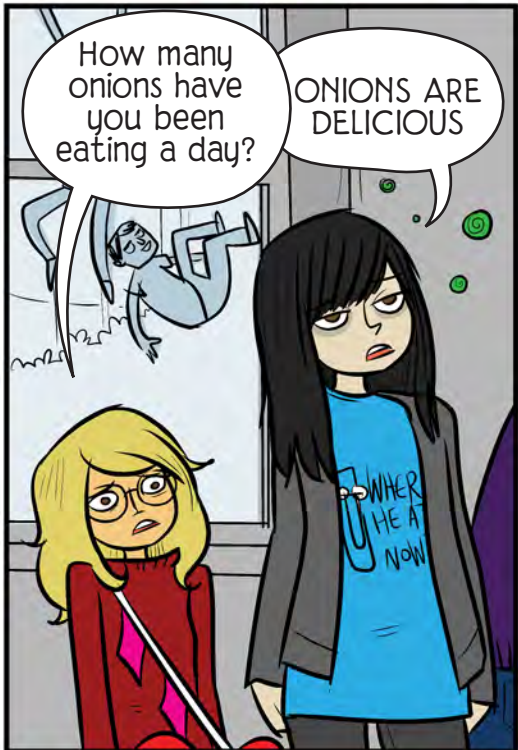


She says Brooklyn is well good, it's the home of fashion and COOT-YORE ideas.

People will just rock up in a suit of armour and a tutu and-



I mean you're almost grey. You all look ill.



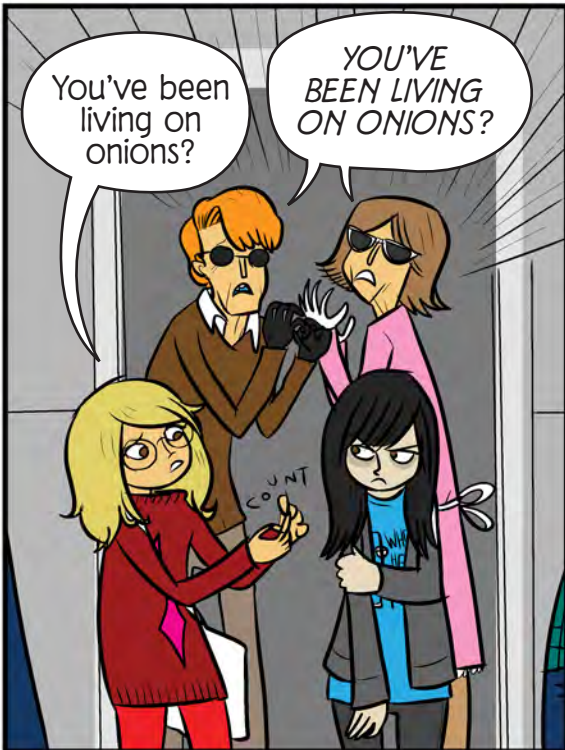
How many onions have you been eating a day?

ONIONS ARE DELICIOUS



Yeah right, very more-ish. How many?

I donno, twenty? They're well cheap.



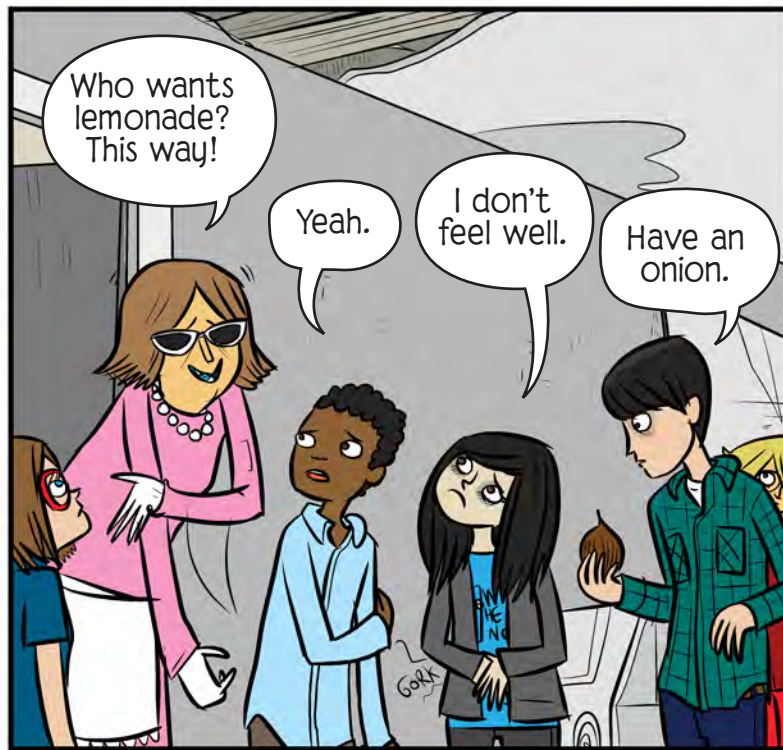
You've been living on onions?

**YOU'VE BEEN LIVING ON ONIONS?**



Lem, what have you done to these children?

**MUSIC IS AMAZING, JACK.**







Habba habba

Pris... pris...

Koko

GORK



Move, Shauna

MOVE



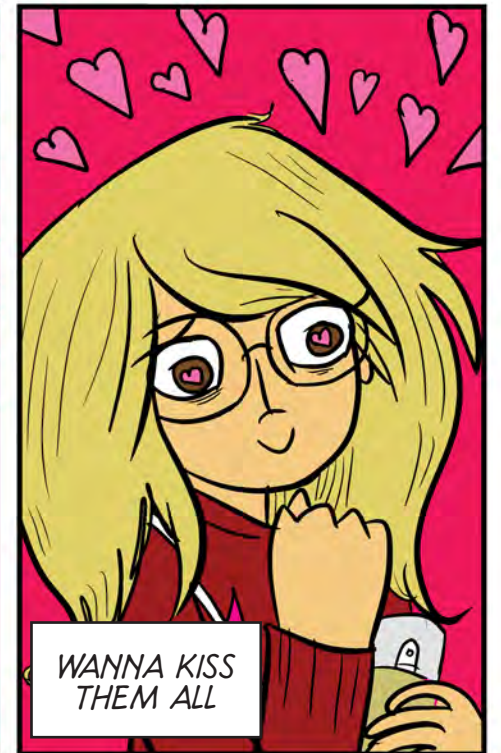
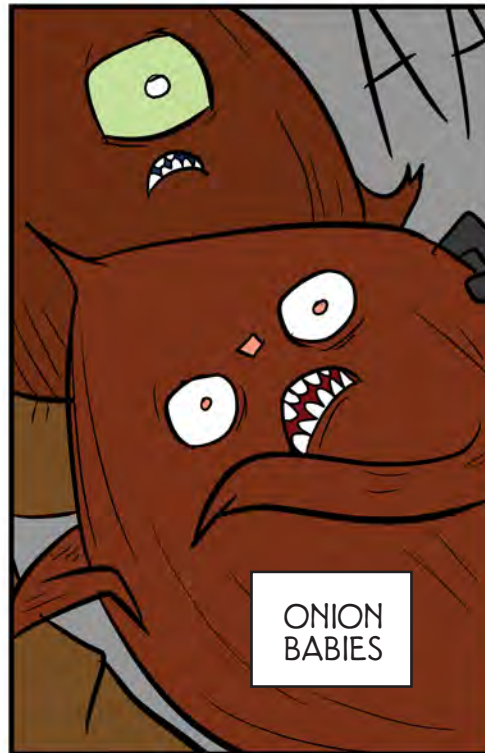
HAVE TO STOP SCREAMING

GOING TO BLOW A GASKET

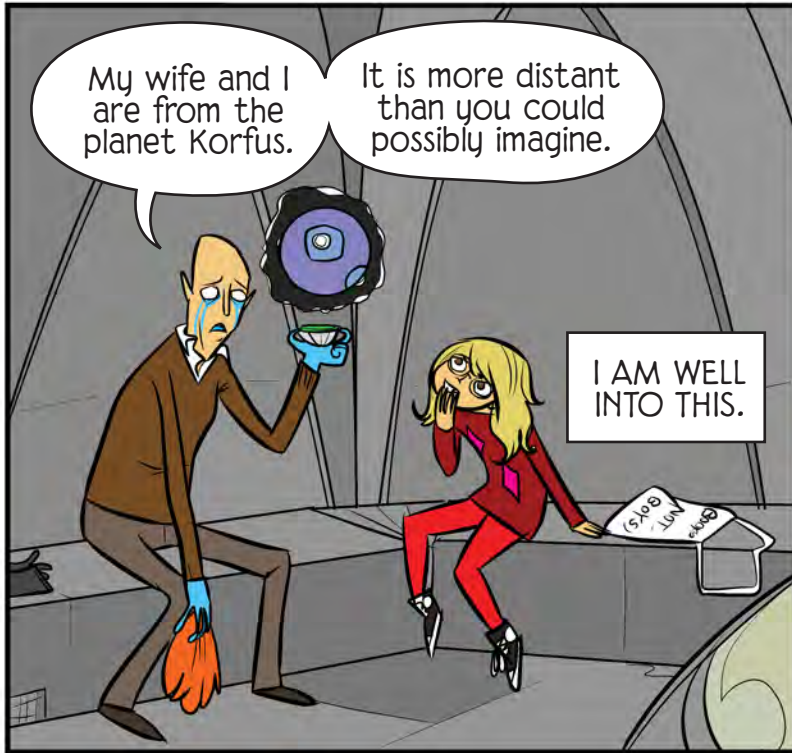


Only one option...

LET IT ALL OUT IN ONE MEGA SCREAM!



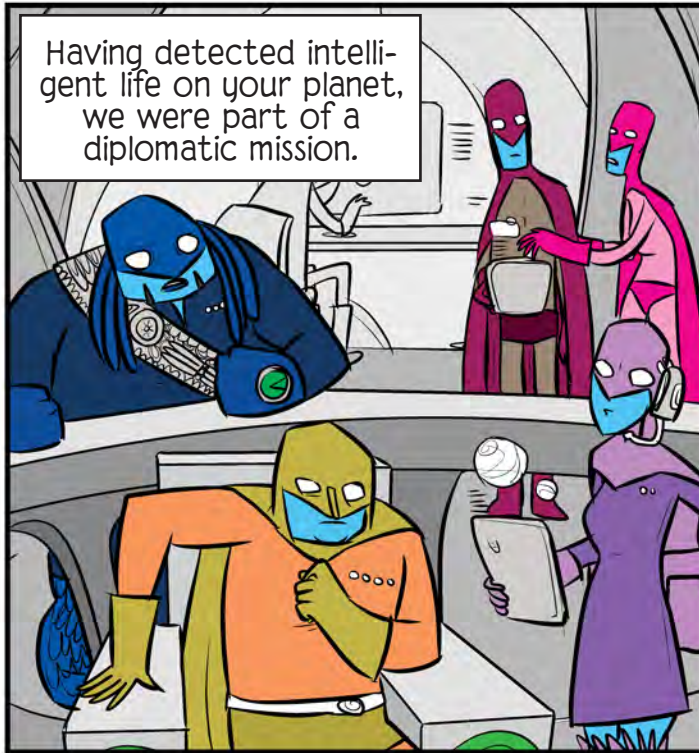




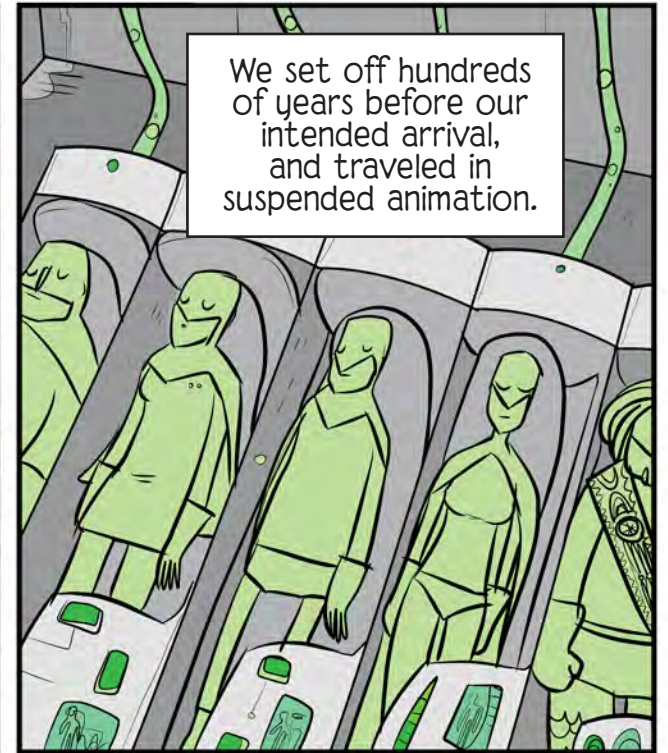
My wife and I are from the planet Korfus.

It is more distant than you could possibly imagine.

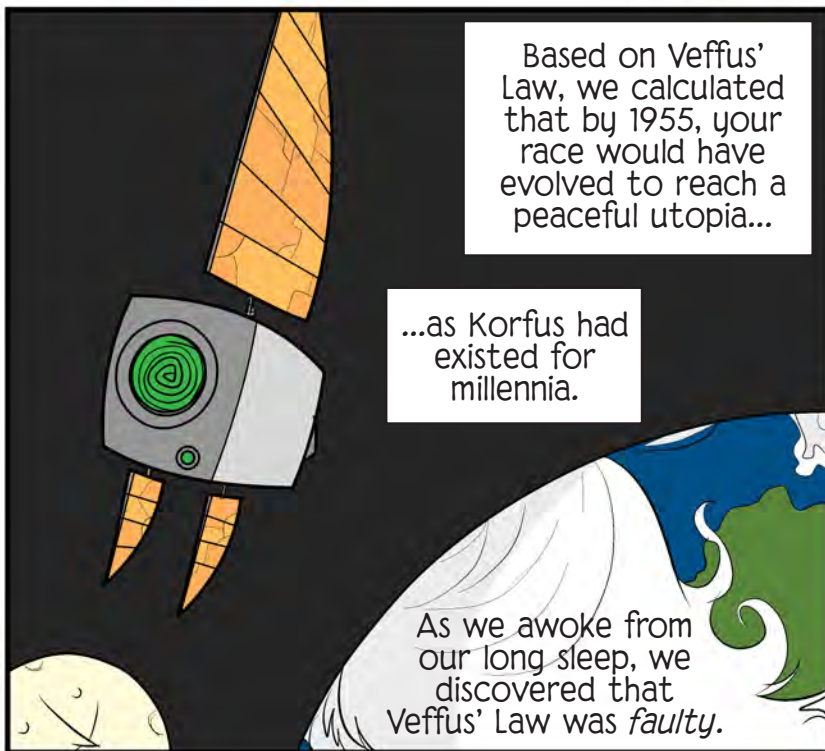
I AM WELL INTO THIS.



Having detected intelligent life on your planet, we were part of a diplomatic mission.



We set off hundreds of years before our intended arrival, and traveled in suspended animation.



Based on Veffus' Law, we calculated that by 1955, your race would have evolved to reach a peaceful utopia...

...as Korfus had existed for millennia.

As we awoke from our long sleep, we discovered that Veffus' Law was *faulty*.

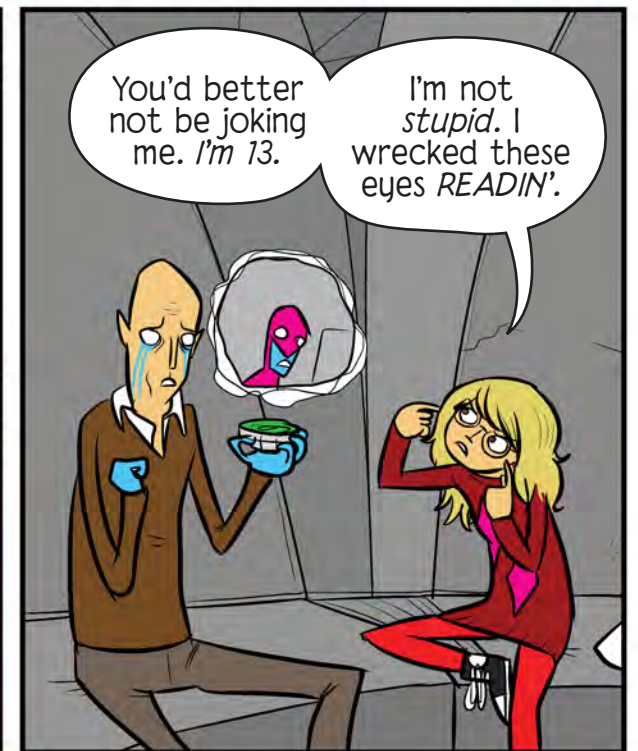


Yeah because humans still LOVED fightin'?



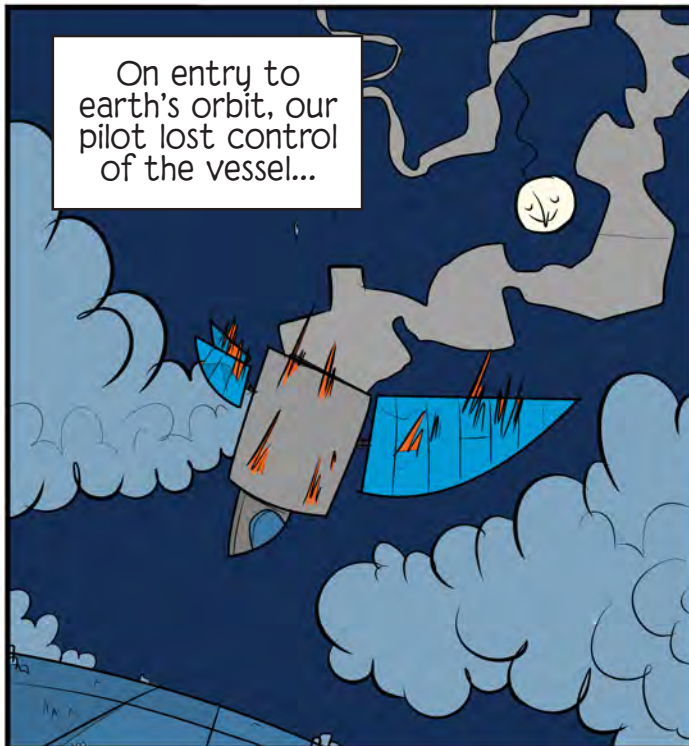
No. We discovered that our own planet had been destroyed...

...in "The Battle Of Whose Turn Is It".

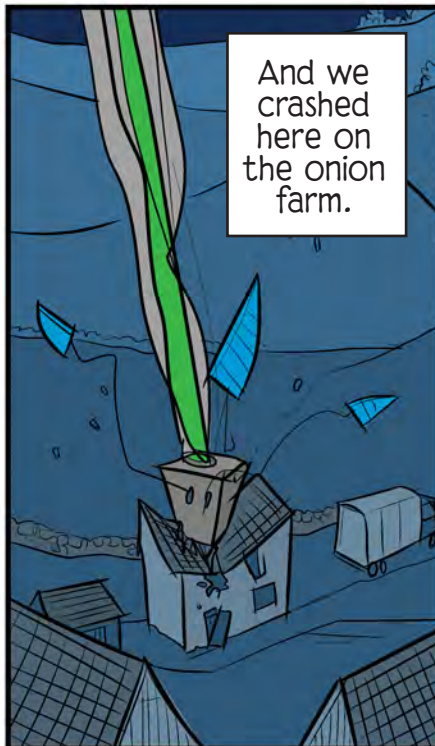


You'd better not be joking me. I'm 13.

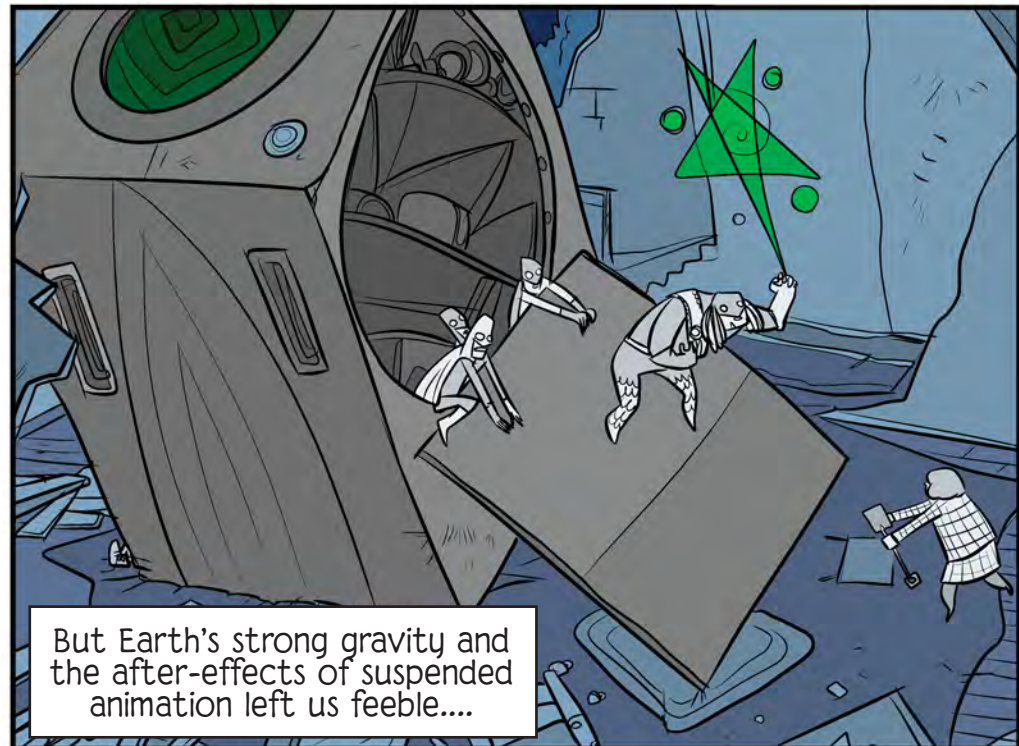
I'm not *stupid*. I wrecked these eyes *READIN'*.



On entry to earth's orbit, our pilot lost control of the vessel...



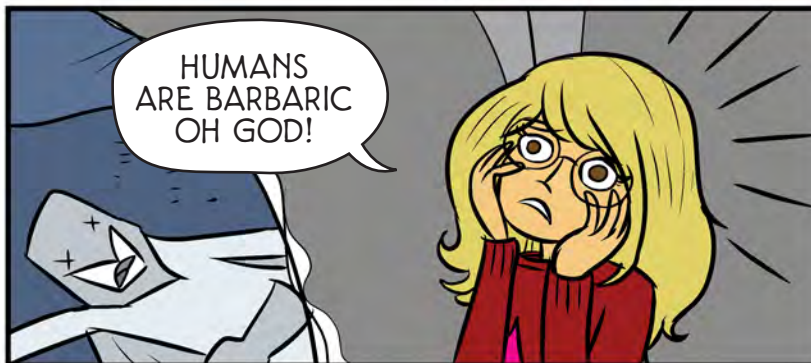
And we crashed here on the onion farm.



But Earth's strong gravity and the after-effects of suspended animation left us feeble....



...and most of the crew were slain by the farmer's wife with a shovel.



HUMANS ARE BARBARIC OH GOD!

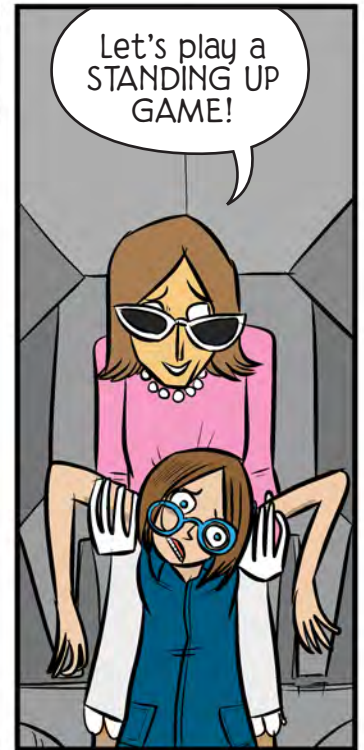
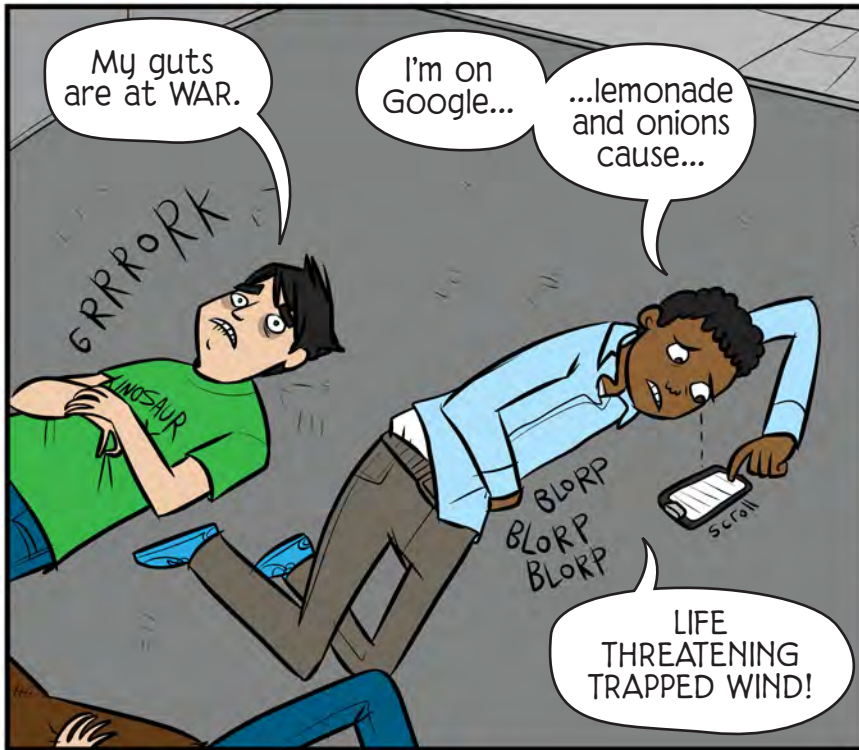
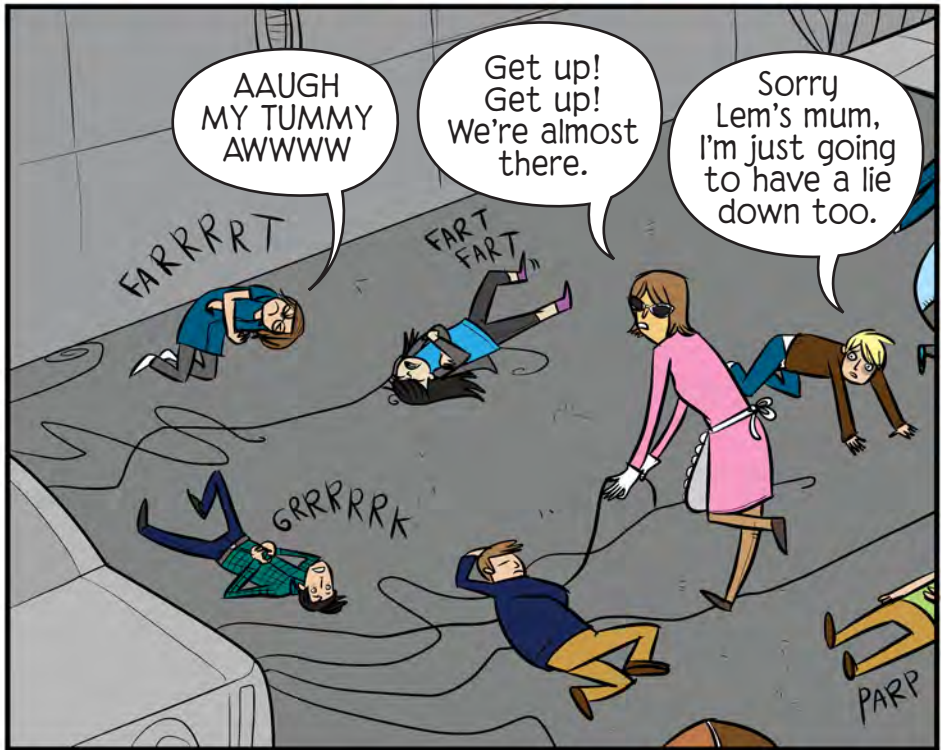
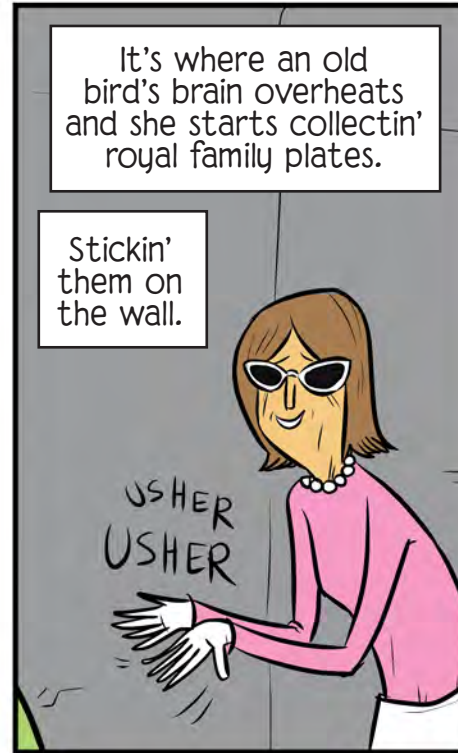


Wait did you crash the space ship on the FARMER

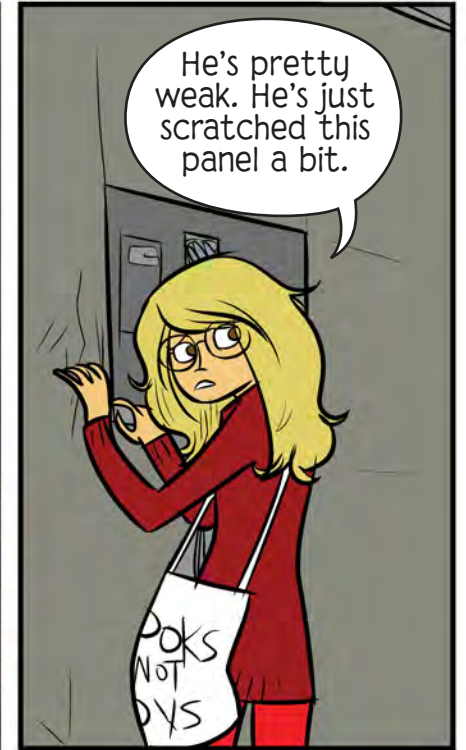


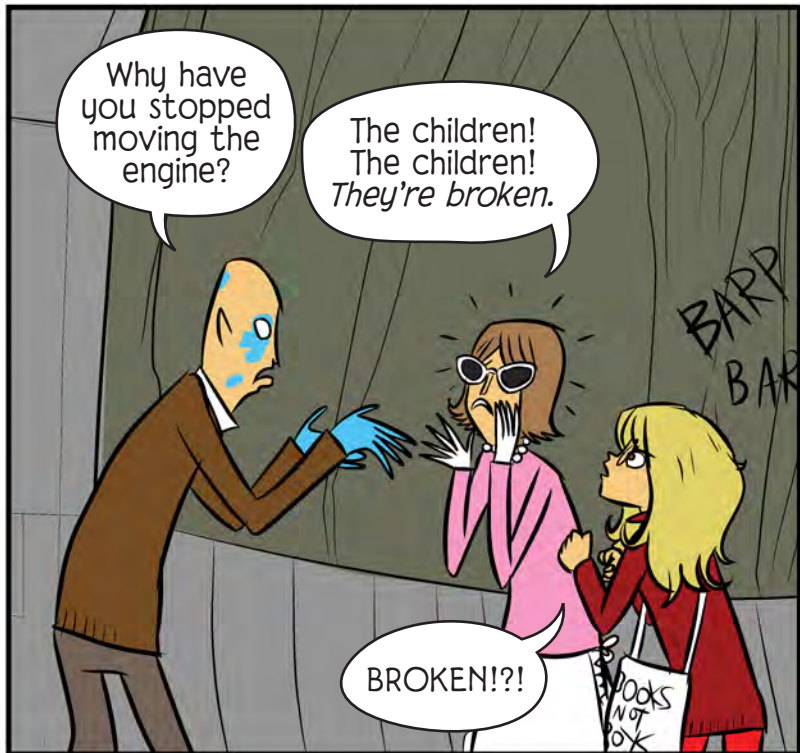
I... don't remember...

SHAME ON YOU









Why have you stopped moving the engine?

The children! The children! They're broken.

BROKEN!?!

BARD BAR

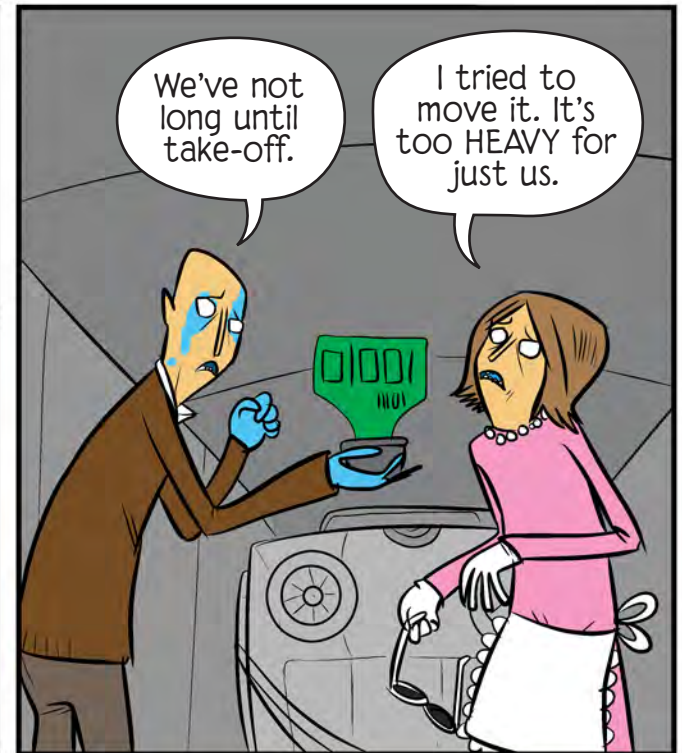


I've blown up like a dead sheep in a river, Shauna!

I told you! Onions are a sometimes food!

GORK

Books NOT BOYS



We've not long until take-off.

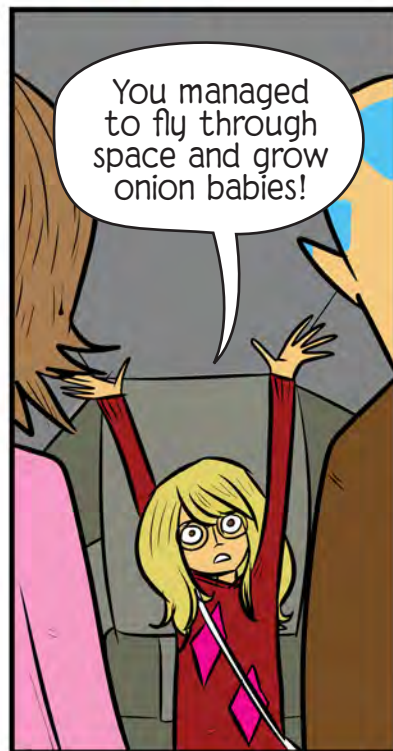
I tried to move it. It's too HEAVY for just us.



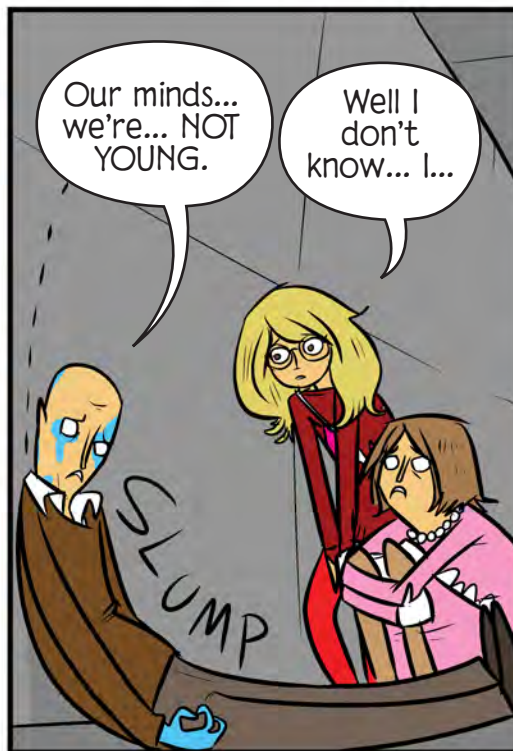
This is just a physics problem! *Basic physics!*

I thought you were scientists!

FIRE MOVIE



You managed to fly through space and grow onion babies!



Our minds... we're... NOT YOUNG.

Well I don't know... I...

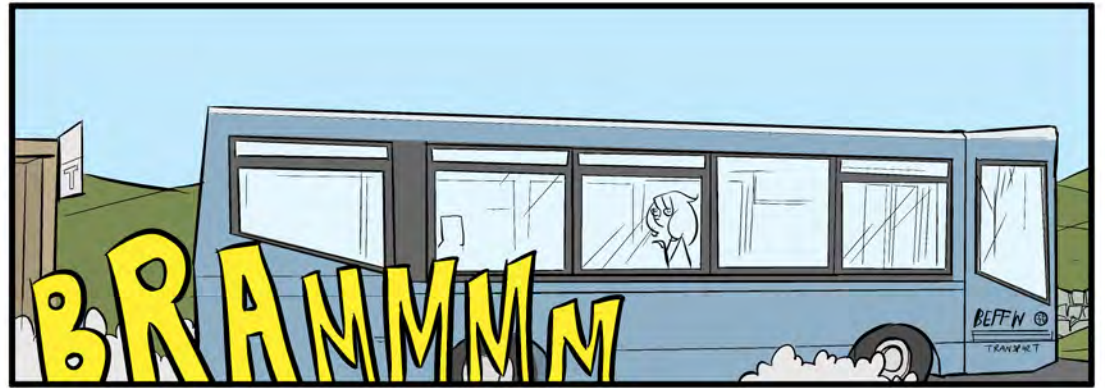
SLUMP

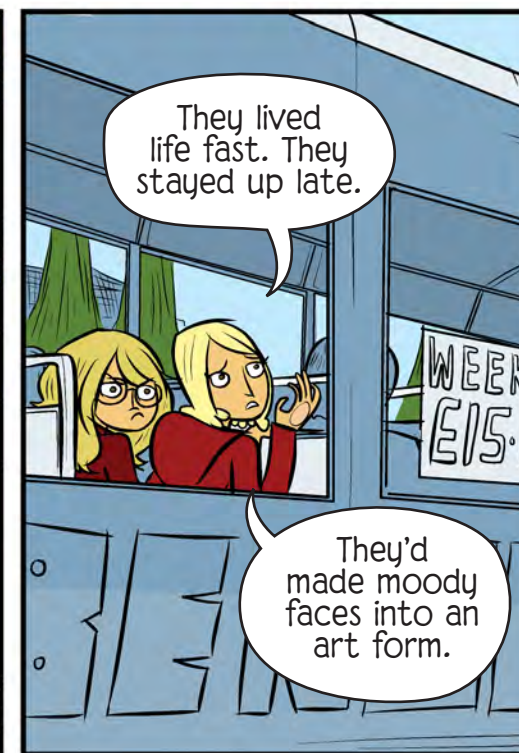
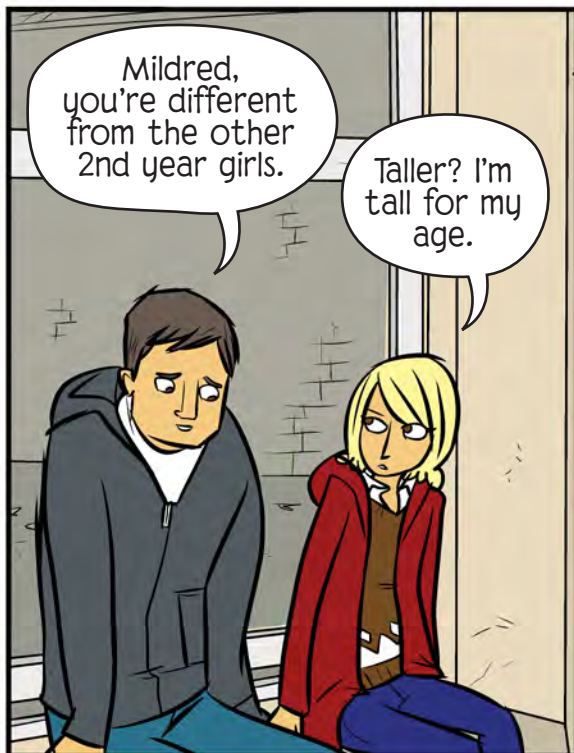


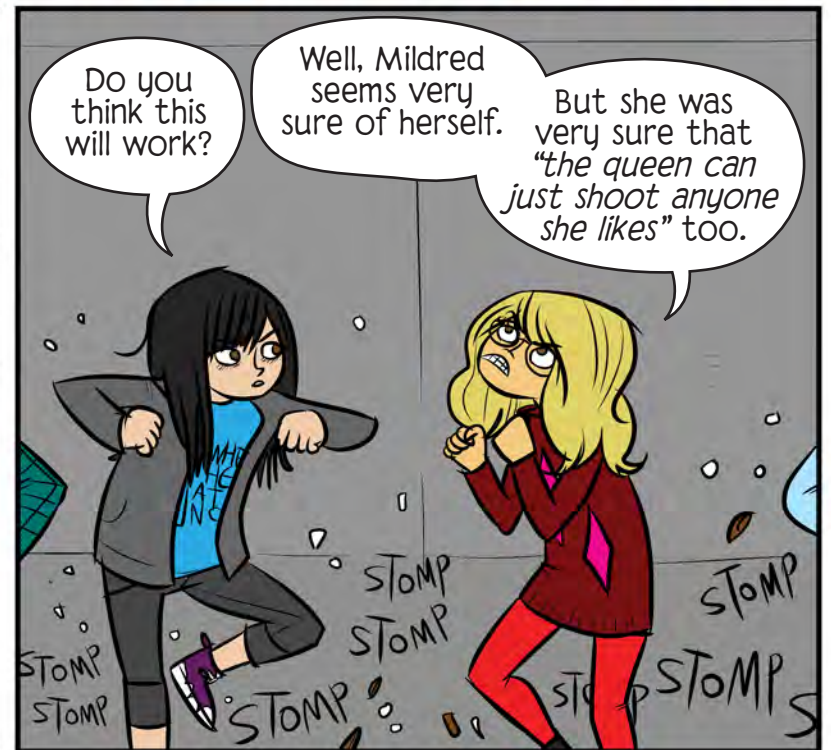
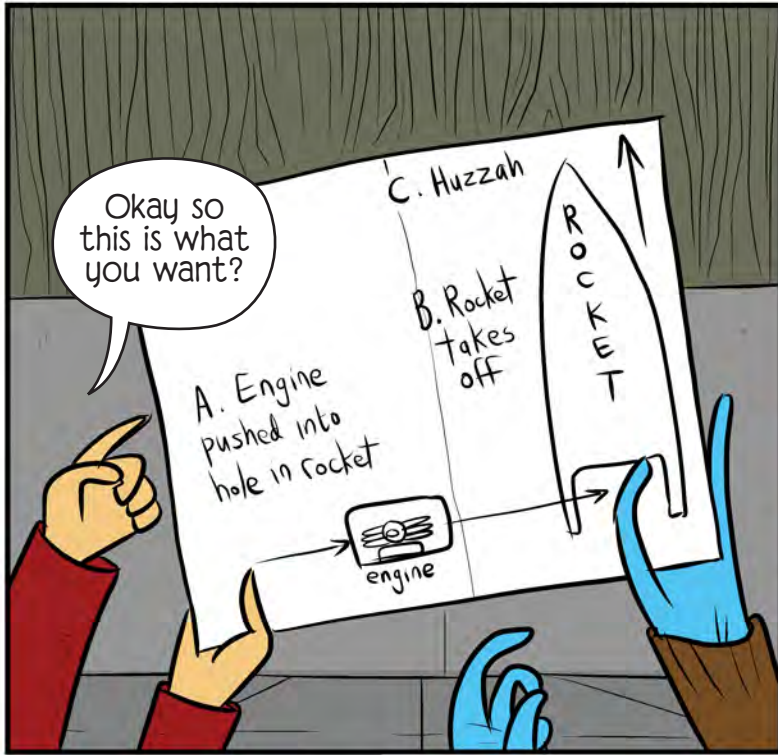
Ngh! I don't GET IT.

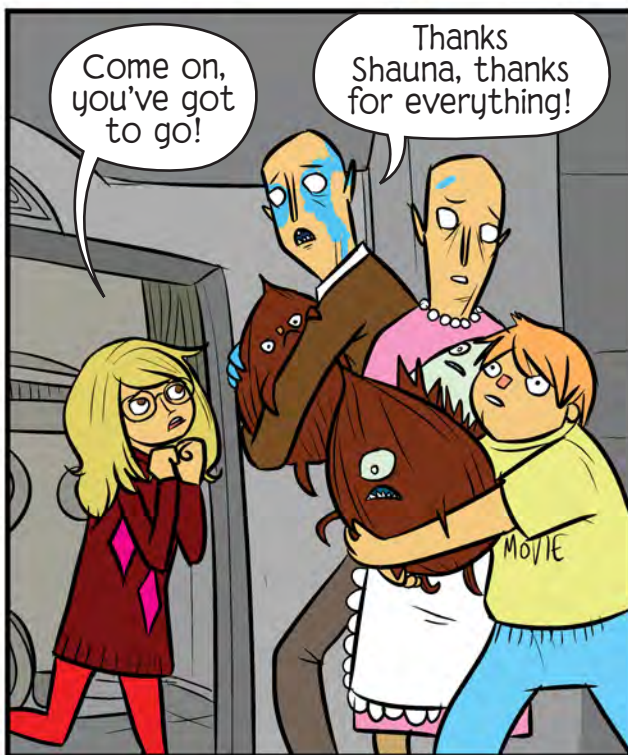
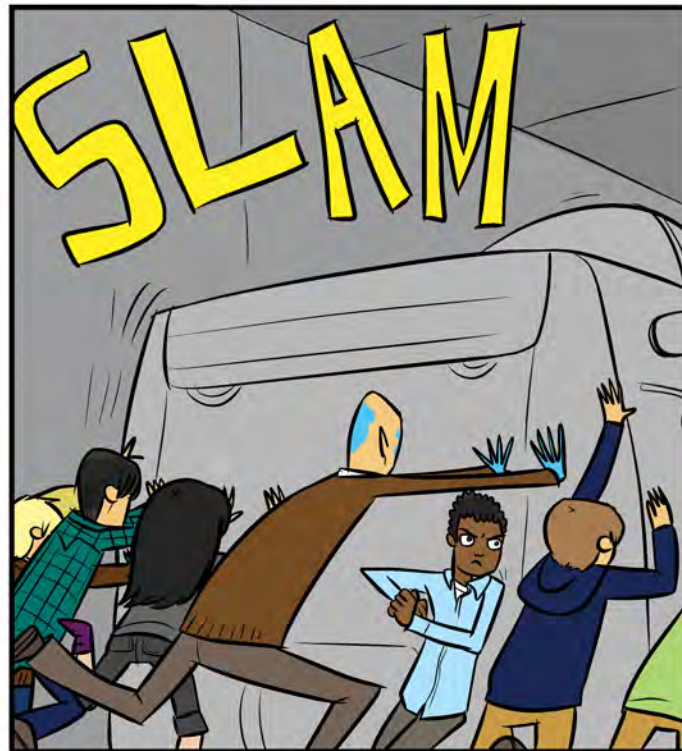
Shauna I thought you wanted to be an architect! Come on!

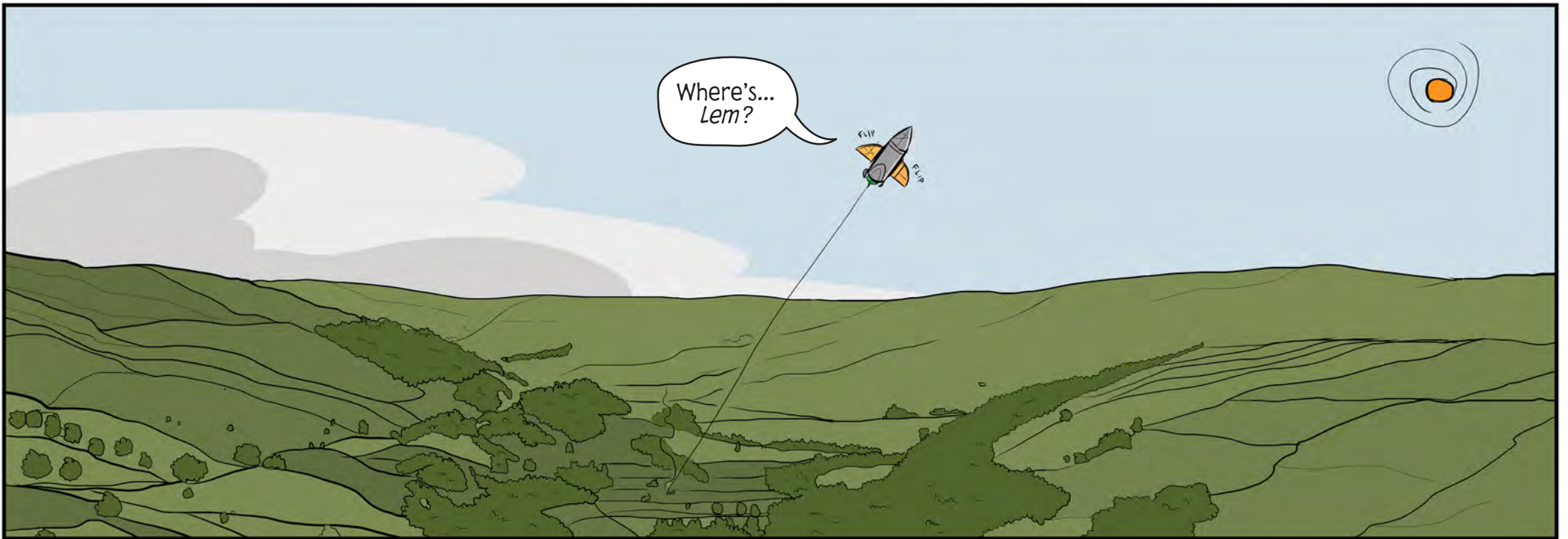
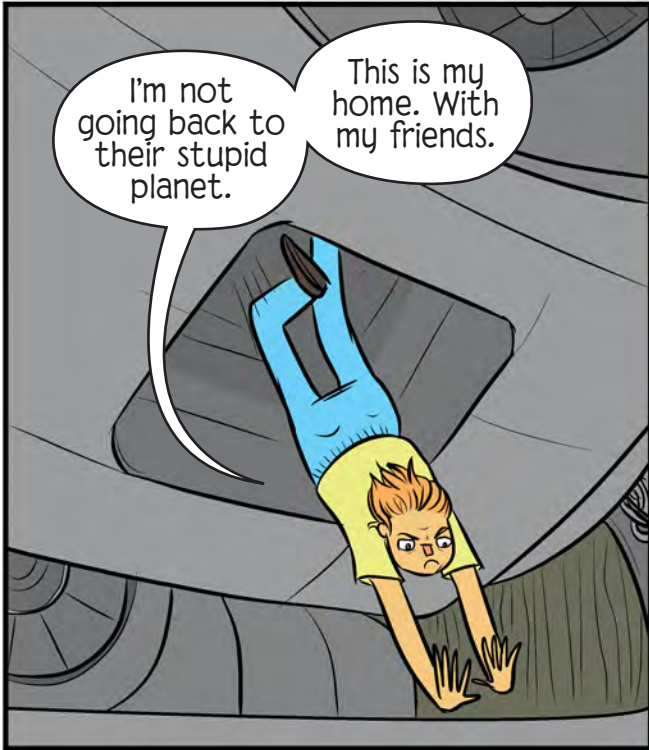
*Basic physics!*













They could have warned us about the FLAMES.

My eye-brows have only just grown back.

There's something moving in the ash.

Oh no! They must have missed an onion baby!

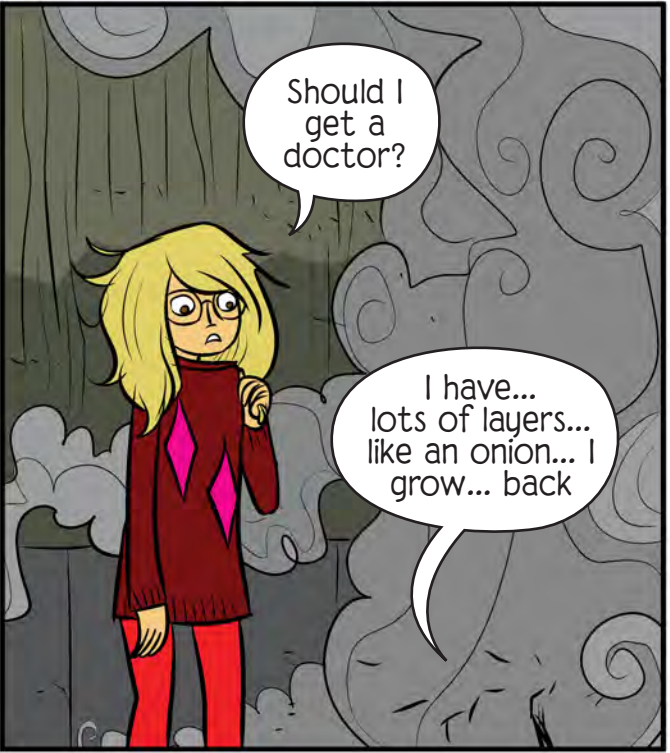
HUKKK



HUKK  
I'll be okay



LEM?!



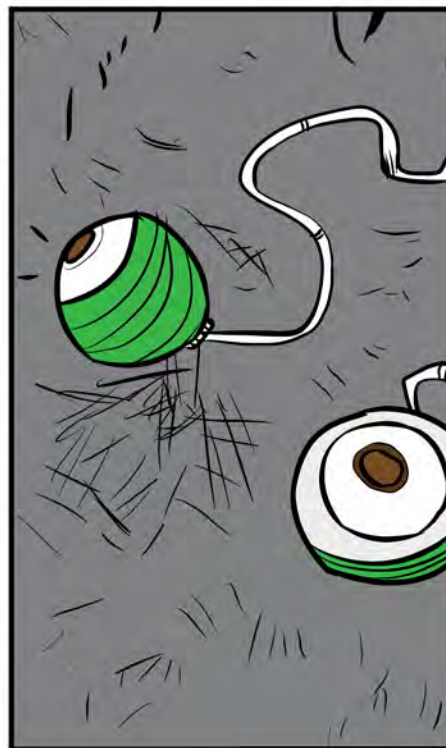
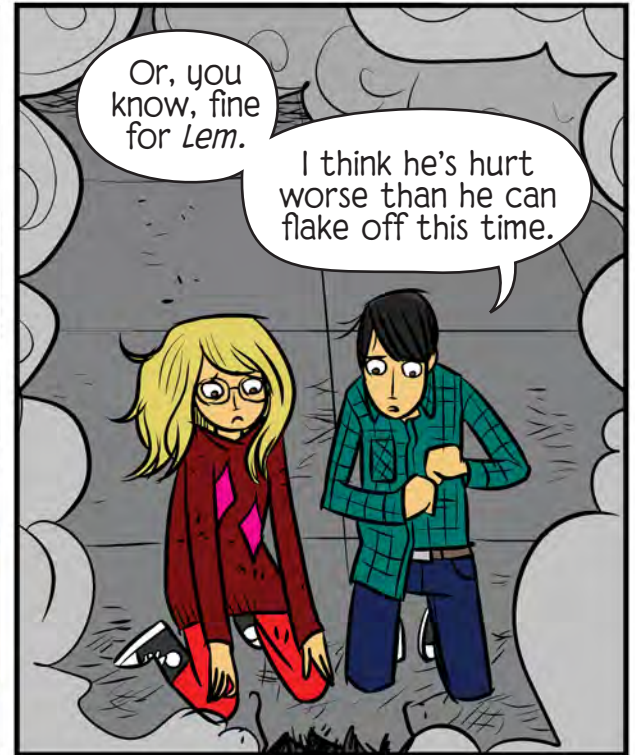
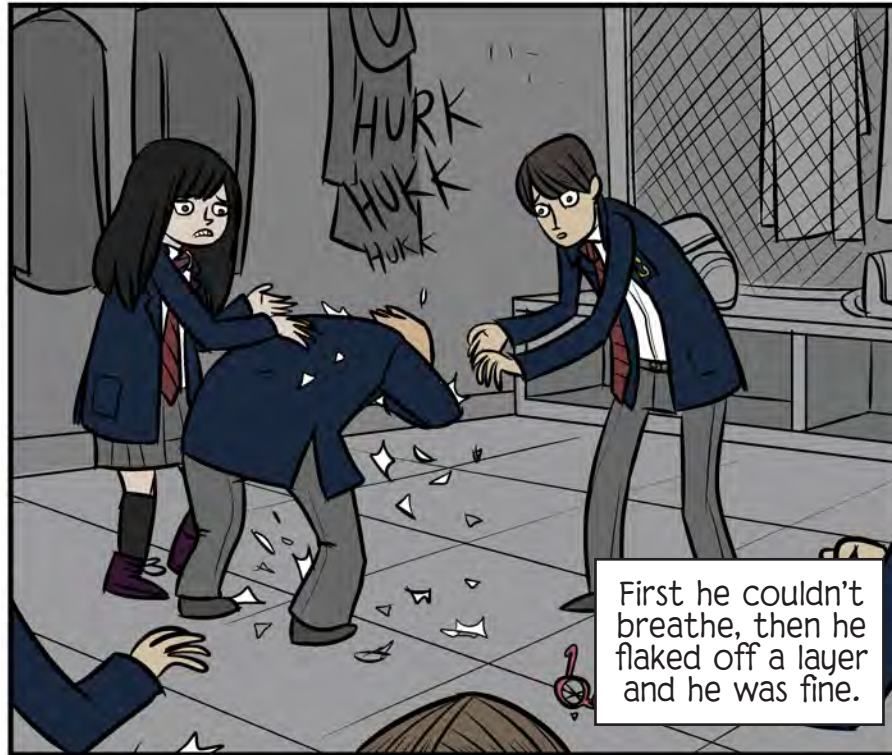
Should I get a doctor?

I have... lots of layers... like an onion... I grow... back



Doctor? Dustpan and brush more like.

WHAT?

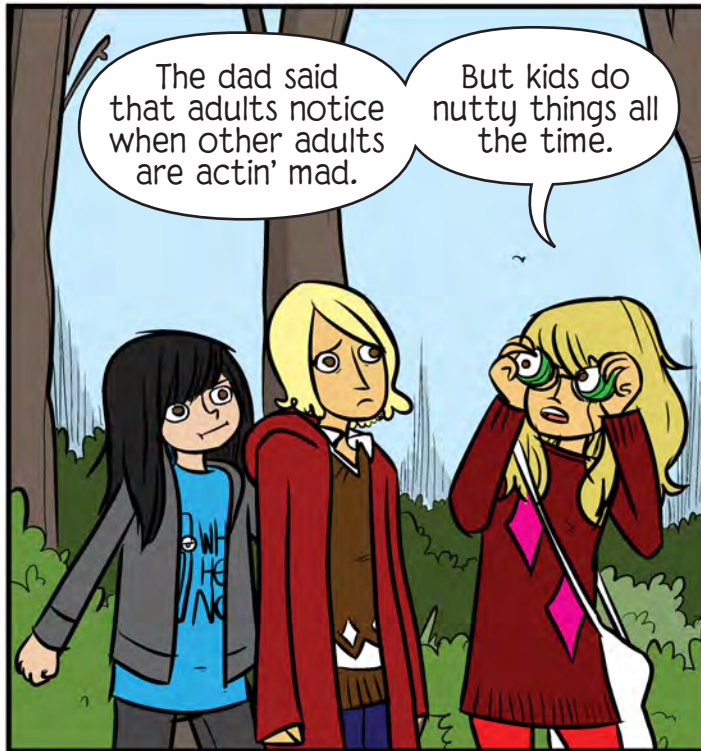
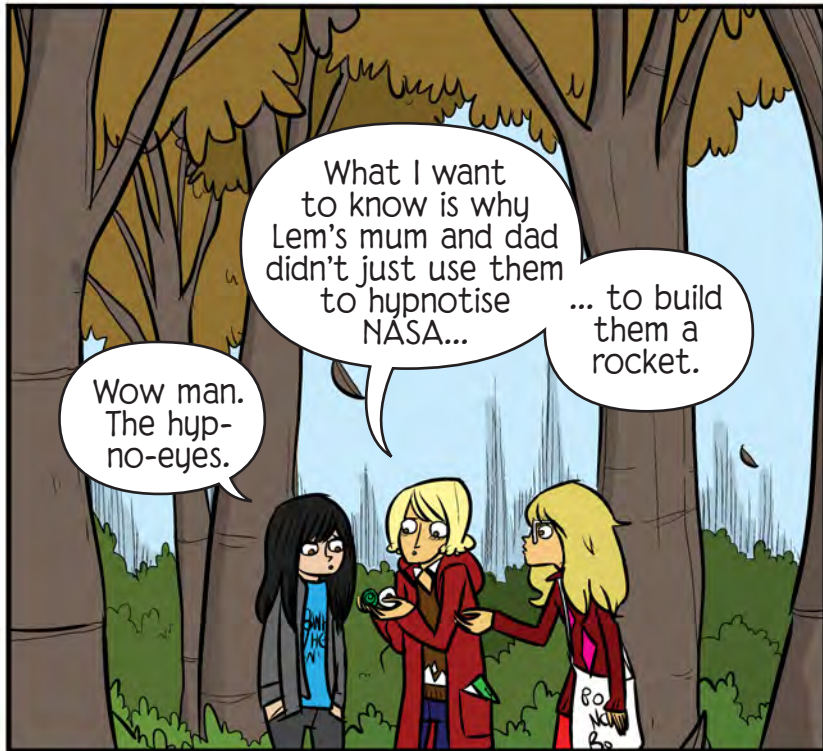


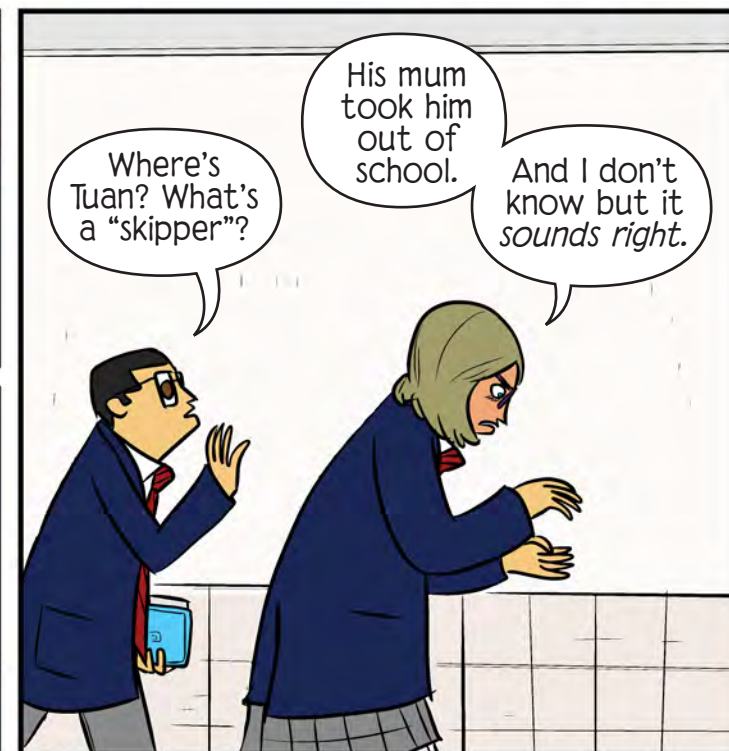
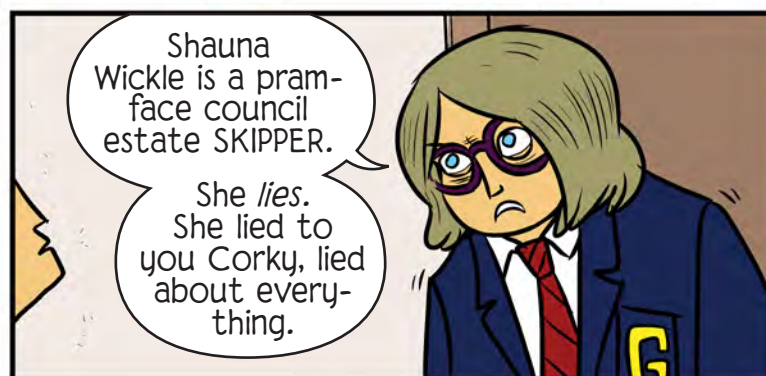
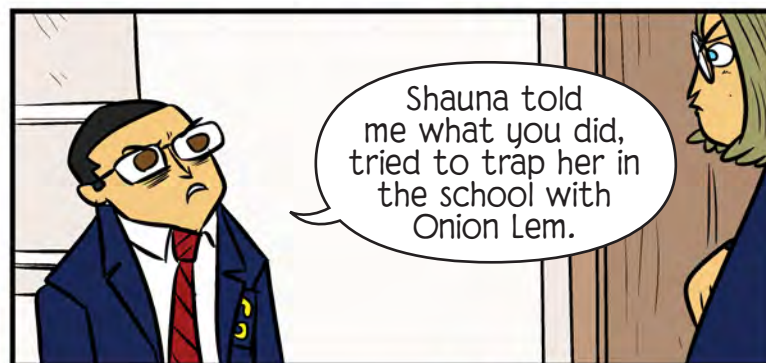
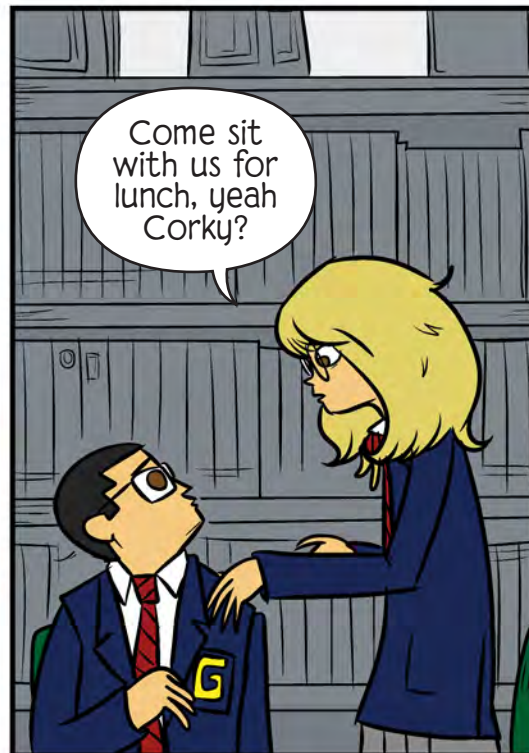


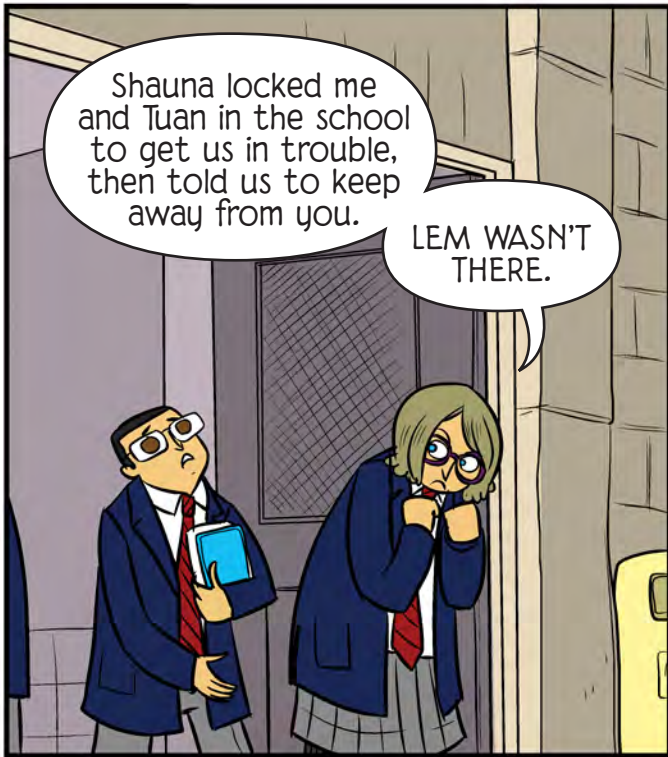
Don't get hypnotised, Mildred!

Don't worry.

I don't think they've got a lot of go left in 'em.







Shauna locked me and Tuan in the school to get us in trouble, then told us to keep away from you.

LEM WASN'T THERE.



Now everyone's looking at me and whispering.

It's not FAIR.



We've been friends a long time.

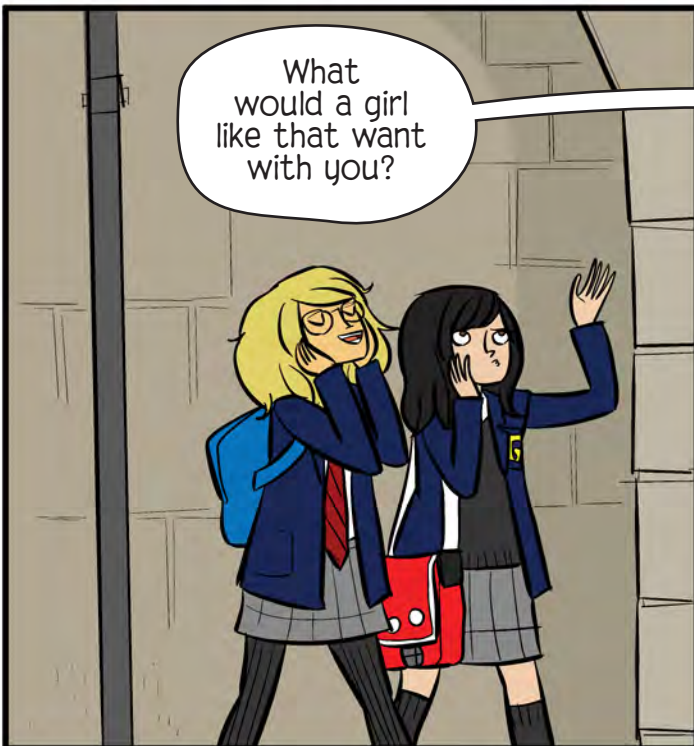
You've known her 5 minutes.

But-



She said she could "have anyone she wanted".

Who do you believe?



What would a girl like that want with you?



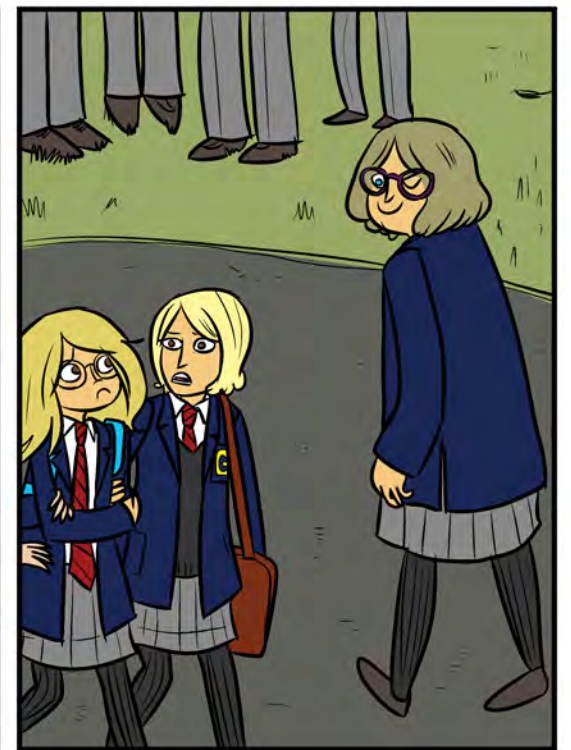
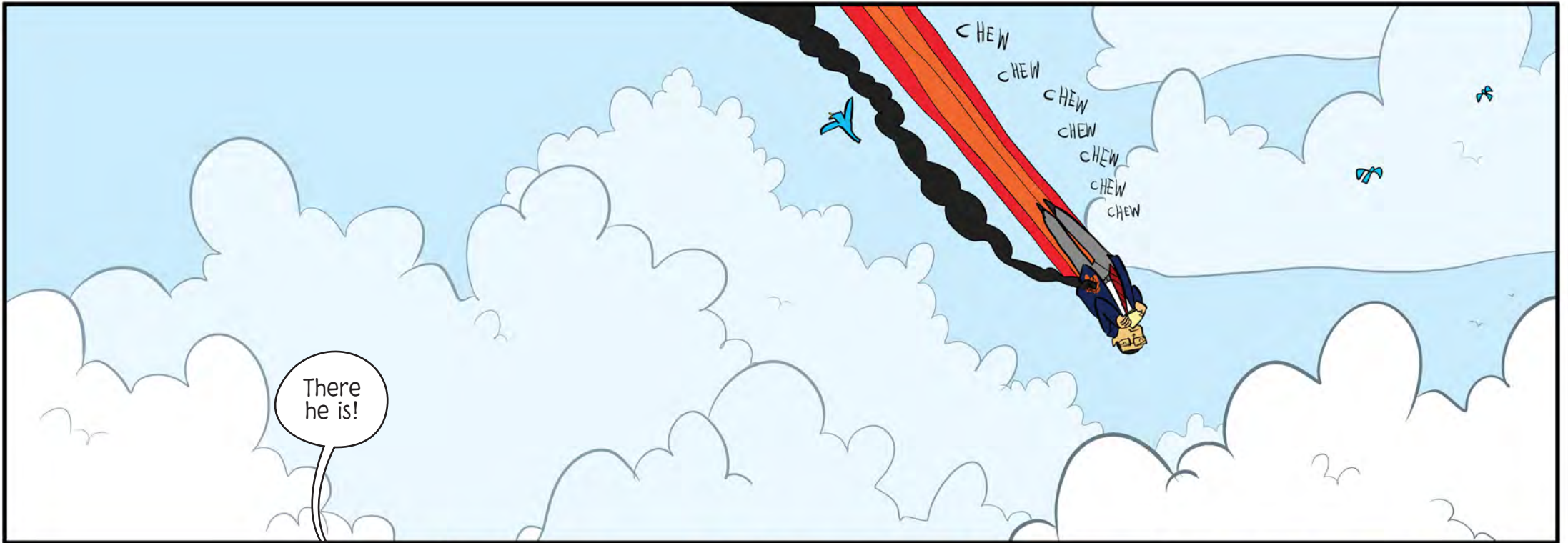
She and her mates just want to laugh at you behind your back.

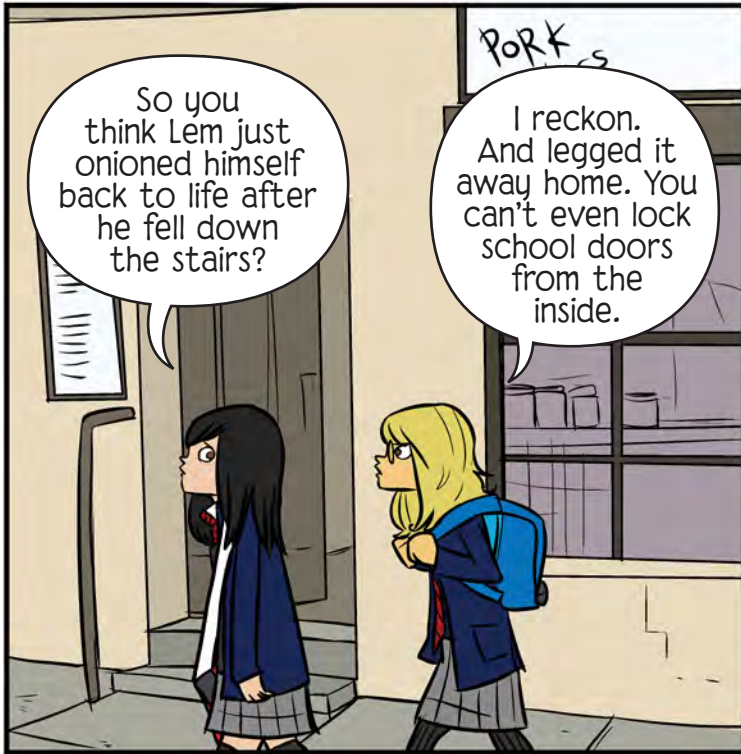


I'm your real friend.

I know.

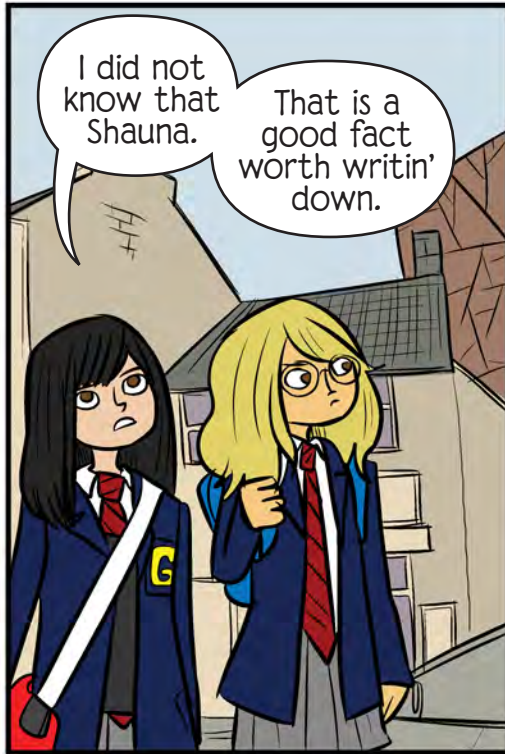
I've got my tuba lesson. See you in History.





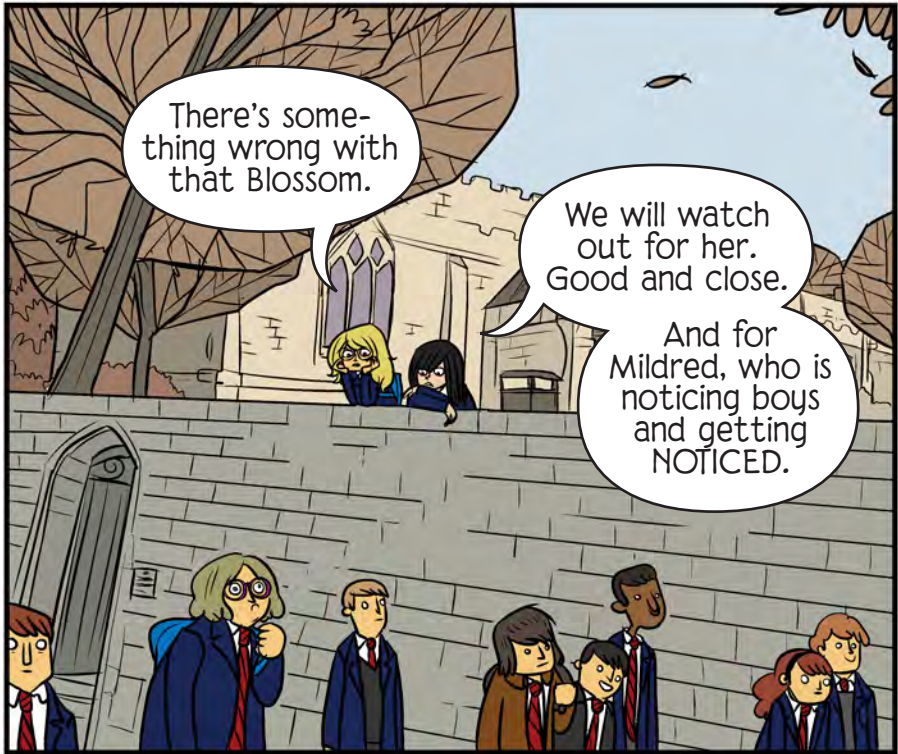
So you think Lem just onioned himself back to life after he fell down the stairs?

I reckon. And legged it away home. You can't even lock school doors from the inside.



I did not know that Shauna.

That is a good fact worth writin' down.



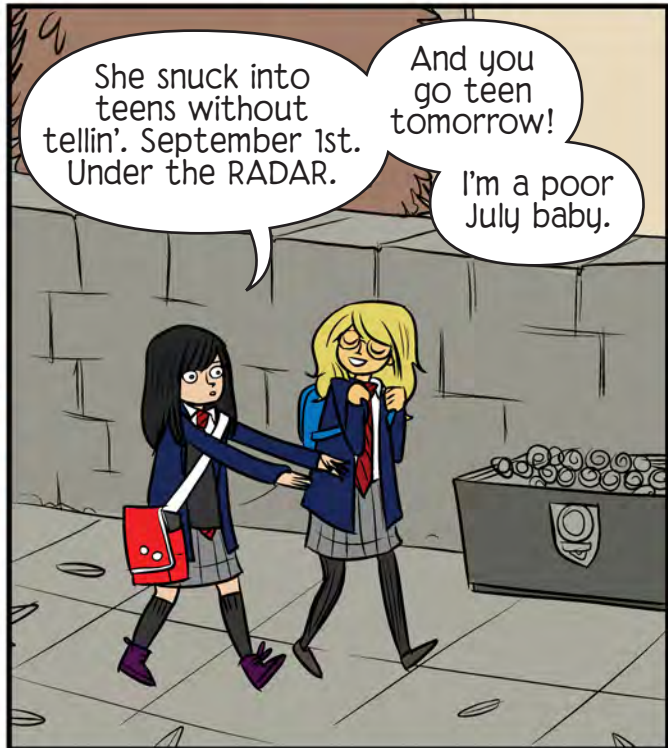
There's something wrong with that Blossom.

We will watch out for her. Good and close.

And for Mildred, who is noticing boys and getting NOTICED.



She's not little and loud now. She's sort of... *willowy*? Willowy.



She snuck into teens without tellin'. September 1st. Under the RADAR.

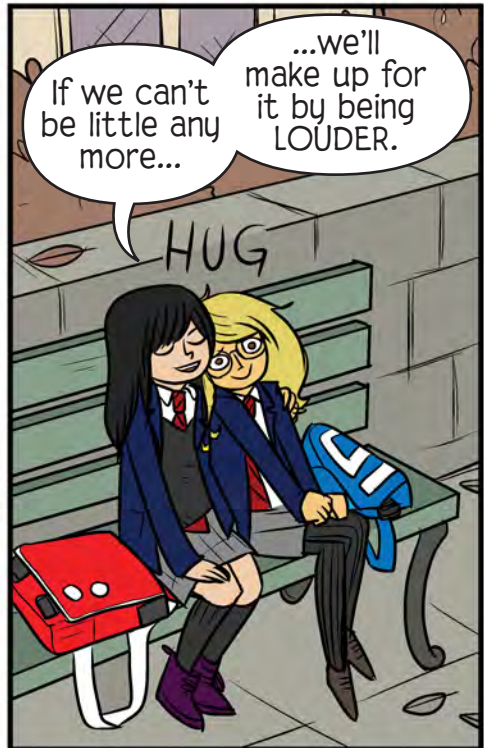
And you go teen tomorrow!

I'm a poor July baby.



Still a wiggler and an egg when you popped out.

I miss being little and loud, Lottie.



If we can't be little any more...

...we'll make up for it by being LOUDER.



THE



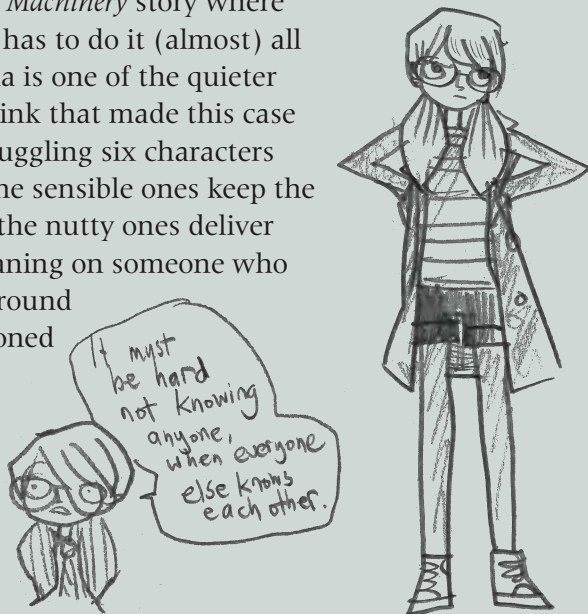
END

# SKETCHBOOK

The way I write my stories is always changing, but I prefer to do most of the work with pencil and paper if I can. Writing things out longhand means I can draw alongside my notes, try out visual jokes, rough out characters, and work anywhere without needing my computer or a power outlet, away from distractions. I wrote most of this story on trains in cheap square sketchbooks. Here are some of my favourite rough drawings and what I remember about writing *The Case Of The Lonely One* four years ago.

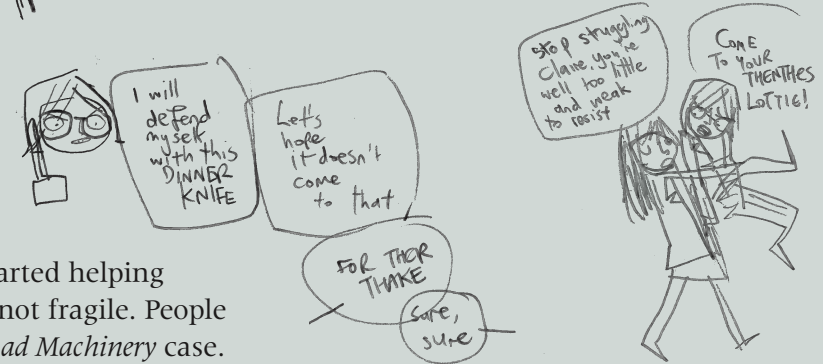
## SHAUNA

This is the first *Bad Machinery* story where one mystery solver has to do it (almost) all on her own. Shauna is one of the quieter characters, but I think that made this case more interesting. Juggling six characters often means that the sensible ones keep the plot moving while the nutty ones deliver some hot jokes. Leaning on someone who couldn't just fool around while being abandoned by all her friends meant that I had to change how I told a story. Anything that forces me to not to be lazy is good.



## LITTLE CLAIRE

I introduced Little Claire in the last case as a fun character (admittedly, a fun character who has a slight problem with pyromania). I still thought of her that way until she started helping Shauna. Although she's little, she's not fragile. People underestimate her in almost every *Bad Machinery* case.



## CORKY'S HOUSE

Drawing fancy houses is a treat. I go on real estate websites, type in a price that I could never afford, and have a snoop around all the photos. It's free fun! Don't judge me!



## BLOSSOM, CORKY & TUAN

When I start drawing a story, the details for the later parts are very loose, so that anything that occurs to me as I'm working can be slotted in. This often means that characters who start with small parts get built up if they work well.

Tuan, Corky and Blossom didn't even have names when I started, but they all got their own little backstories. Cork and Tuan play as standard nerds, but Blossom is my favourite of the three. Nobody is going to mess with her and get away with it. She's a much more formidable enemy for Shauna than poor pitiful Lem the onion boy.



## MRS LORD

Mrs Lord was just a name in my notes for this story until the day before I had to write her first scene. I think she's the sort of person who no one has ever said "no" to. I had a little drawing of a French actress in my sketchbook. "That'll do", I thought.

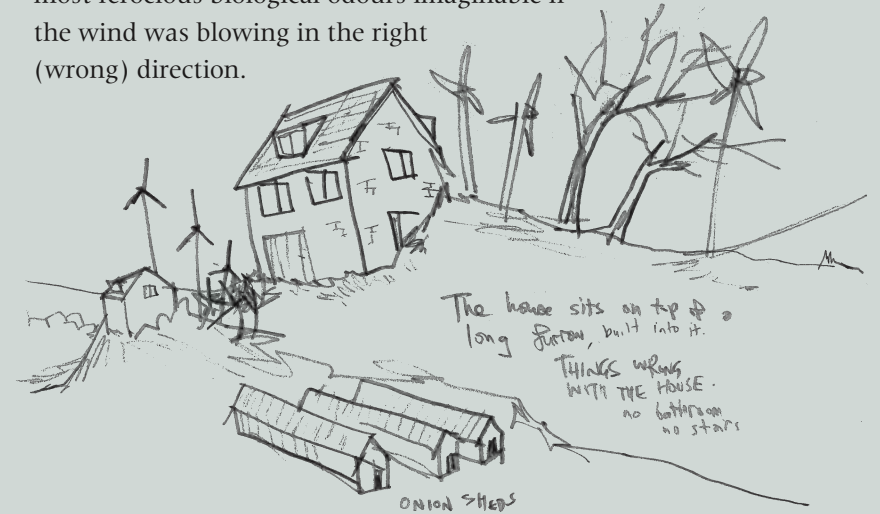
## THE MYSTERY KIDS

The mystery kids change a little bit in every story, but this is the story where the girls start to become little women. They're trying on slightly more sophisticated ideas for size, while the boys are probably still swapping stickers and throwing loose debris at each other. On the first day of the second year of grammar school, I remember seeing the new intake, and they looked almost impossibly little. A year ago, that had been us. Social norms and rules and expectations seemed to change so fast during that time that you were never sure what was right and wrong. I think I spent about 50% of the second year of big school absolutely livid, burning furiously with embarrassment.



## THE ONION FARM

I grew up next to a farm. On the plus side, the neighbouring field often contained the same animal you were eating for your dinner, which bred a healthy respect for "livestock". On the downside, one was regaled by some of the most ferocious biological odours imaginable if the wind was blowing in the right (wrong) direction.



## LEM: EVOLUTION OF ONION BOY



Lem's design came quite easily. Initially, he was meant to be very bland and forgettable, but then I remembered a boy at school who got home haircuts for a bit longer than was probably appropriate. His mother would neatly cut it into a pudding bowl shape, but the natural directions of his hair would turn it into what looked like three haircuts fighting on top of his head. Lem's rounded gait was inspired by the classic shape of a shallot.



## MEET THE PARENTS

I'm particularly fond of Lem's parents, Vizier and Empyrean. I don't think I ever used their names in the comic, so there they are. They're pretty old to be parents, and constantly exhausted by their teenage son. When you want to fit in, as Lem does, no one seems more out of touch with how you feel than your poor parents. When a child becomes a teenager, a parent goes from steering the ship to gripping onto the wheel for dear life and trying to stop the vessel from crashing into a series of ever more dangerous obstacles. And that's when the parent isn't an ancient alien hiding in a wrecked spaceship under a decrepit onion farm.



## HYPNO EYES

Is there a more magical mesmeric trope than the time-honoured hypno-eyes? From Kaa the snake onwards, nothing says "you are under my power" like a spiral. In fact, it's possible to be hypnotised by almost anything spiral shaped. Queen Victoria was famously put into a three-week hypnotic trance just by riding a helter-skelter at a funfair.



## AMY

In the other *Bad Machinery* books, Amy Beckwith-Chilton doesn't really interact with the mystery kids. She only sees them from a distance, the way you or I might safely view a wasp's nest. Like a lot of adults, she's gone from being a child, to not being a child, to forgetting how to talk to children, to being actively afraid of children. It's a very normal, natural process—like puberty. Children are our future, they will replace us one day, turning our bones into gasoline for their futuristic cars. The fear is entirely justified.

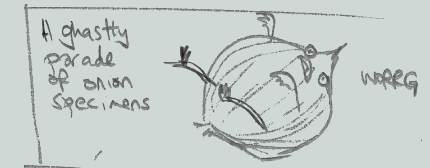
But Amy sets aside the terror of being used to power a flying car by Shauna and takes her under her wing. It's an important day for both of them: the first day that Shauna enters the world of adults on equal terms, and the first time in years that Amy meets a teenager without crossing the street (or crossing herself).

Amy's look in this book is out-there and all over the place. I saw her kicked-out hair, her crazy jacket and her fluffy skirt walking down the street one day and scrawled them down as fast as I could. It was a look that said "confidence", but confidence is just armour for a fragile soul. It's hard to make new friends as an adult, you have to seize the chances when you can. I like Amy and Shauna as friends.



## MR SPINK

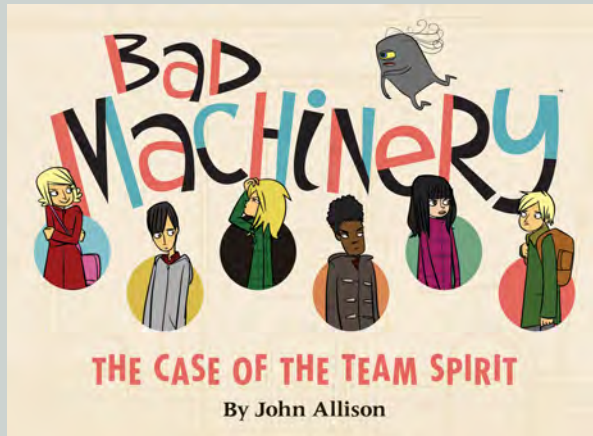
My Latin teacher was a lot like Mr Spink. He was a short man, but every cell of his body was packed with a raw fury that he would unleash upon anyone who got anything wrong in class. He got results: you felt almost religiously compelled to cram the most obscure details of classical grammar and vocabulary into your unreceptive mind. So long as you never got anything wrong, he was quite pleasant. But there was no margin for error, he was wound tighter than a clock spring. He also worked as a barman in a local pub. A pub where, I assume, no one spoke without raising their hand.



## ONION BABIES

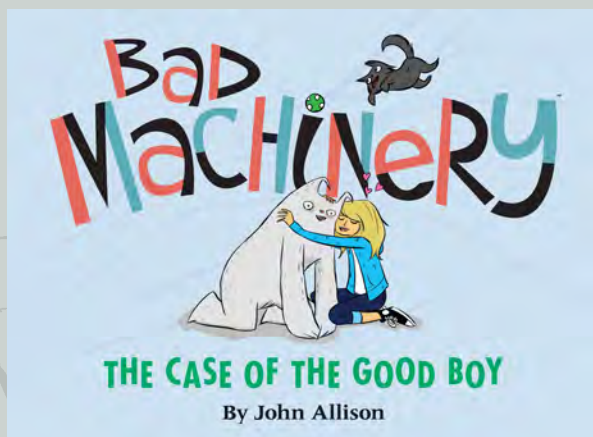
I'm not a geneticist, but I'm ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN that if you tried to create an onion that could walk, talk and gibber, your early efforts would look like the onion babies. They're probably not even babies, are they? They're just small. The same size as an onion. "John, why onions?" you may ask, and the answer is simple. Setting it at a horse farm would have made the story much harder to draw.

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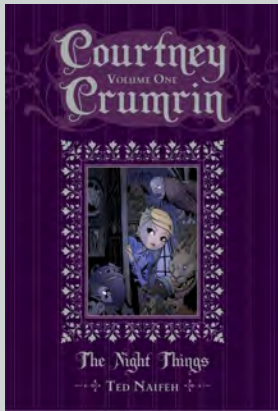
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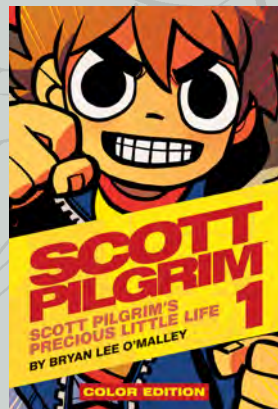
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