

BOBBINS
JOHN ALLISON

HARD YARDS



4

2017



patreon.com/scarygoround

***These comics were originally published at
scarygoround.com from 3/7/2017 to 22/12/2017***

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2017 was an interesting time for me.

By spring 2017 I had been working on *Giant Days* for a couple of years, and what had been intended to be a six-issue limited series was now clearly going to be allowed to run for as long as it was viable. A side-project had become my main thing, but it was a comic was writing and not drawing. I completed work on the 10th and final Bad Machinery story in April, so I had nothing to draw.

Writing a simultaneous second series had been a way to spread my wings, but it also taught me some lessons that hadn't quite sunk in at the this point, namely that if I'm slaving on one thing, I can't bring the same level of inspiration to another project simultaneously. I can produce A-material, and B-material, and the B-material can't be a drain on the A-material. It will also be quite clear to me which is which. I'm not blessed with limitless inspiration. I will never be the sort of comic writer who has four monthly books on the go.

I wrote extensive notes for *Hard Yards* in April, as soon as I finished Bad Machinery. I filled pages of an exercise book, wild-eyed, at my parents' house. It was a four-issue series about Shelley Winters' pregnancy, divided into three trimesters and a post-birth issue. When I looked at what I'd written, bleak at times, I couldn't face six months of drawing it, and set it aside. I drew a few stories and put them online. They were, I think, well drawn, but didn't have much to say. When I'm tired, the characters get tired and sluggish too. There's a seam of material in all these New Bobbins books about being trapped, or uncertain, running away, or reaching back to past connections in lieu of moving forward. I can't imagine what that could be about!

By July, with inspiration thin on the ground, I had nothing new to draw. And really, all I wanted to do was draw comics - I find drawing comics therapeutic, after 20 years, still something I want to do every day. The process of making them is valuable to me. So I went back to the Hard Yards notes, and began to convert them from a sad story into a wild one, another big Bobbins tale like *Out Of The Woods*, something I could draw a piece of every day until it was done. It was going to take a while to do that, and by the end, I would have all sorts of exciting new ideas.

Of course, that meant resolving a number of plot points (again). Tim's father - ghost, hallucination or time-traveller? was the main one. That hadn't been in the original version, which was a played-straight two-hander about setting aside the irresponsibility of youth. My notes for it say it should "be clear of Scary Go Round Universe baggage"; it was intended to be purely a human story. The version which emerged is clearly the exact opposite in some ways. It has baggage galore. I tried to retain as much of the humanity as I could.

The third issue (of four) of my original version was all Shelley's Italian book tour. A chance for some reflective bucolia. I didn't think that would make a very good webcomic - it was a longform idea. So I replaced it with some pretty brutal logic - the mystery kids of Bad Machinery would not be able to ignore what Tim Jones had been up to in their town since his return. This was how I would wind things up: one era of my comics pitted against another. Another daffy caper in a long line of them. I decided then that the last pages of Hard Yards would be the last Tackleford webcomics.

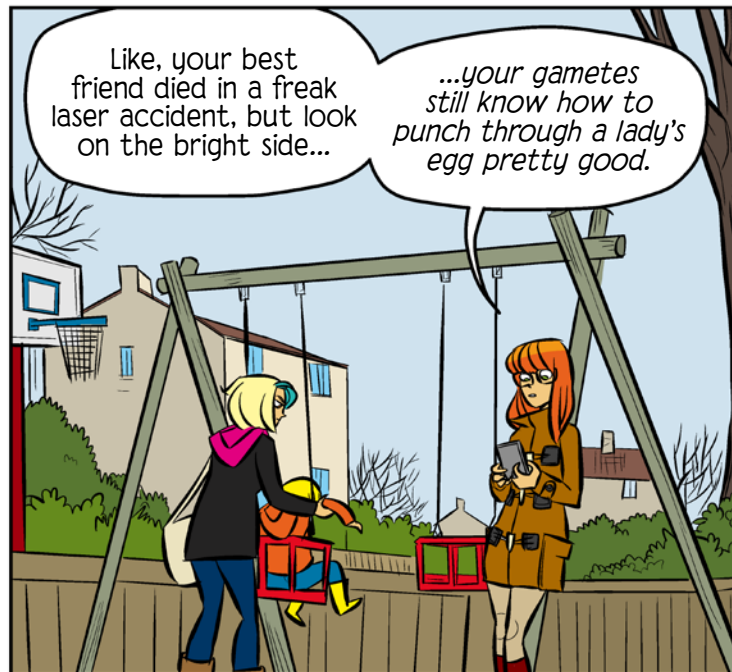
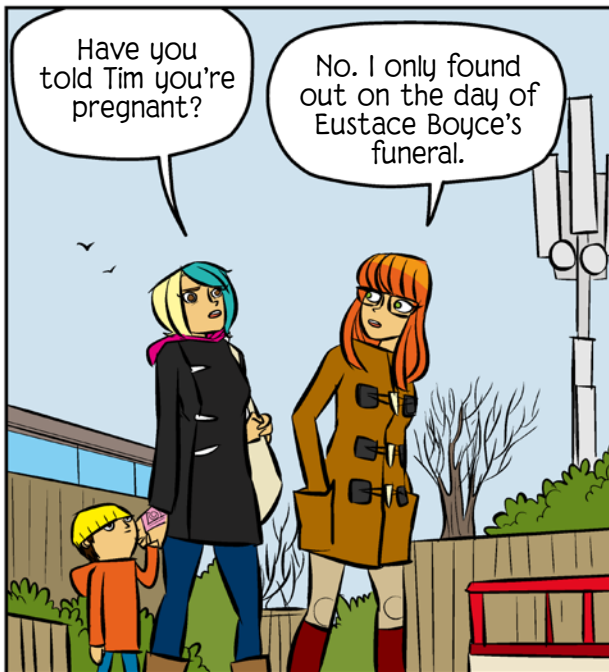
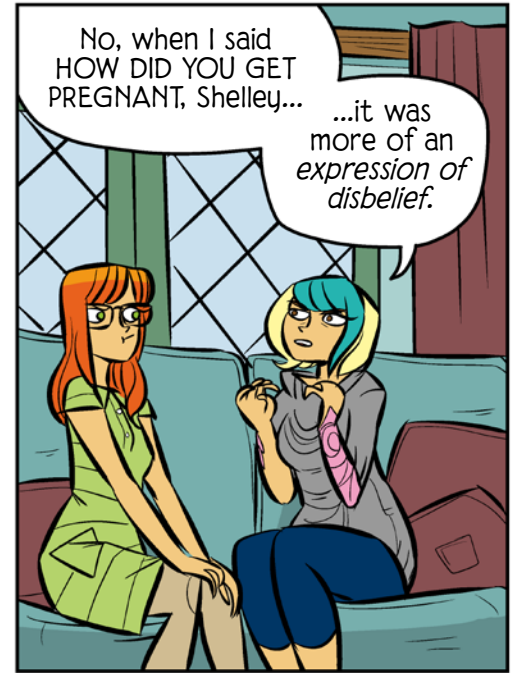
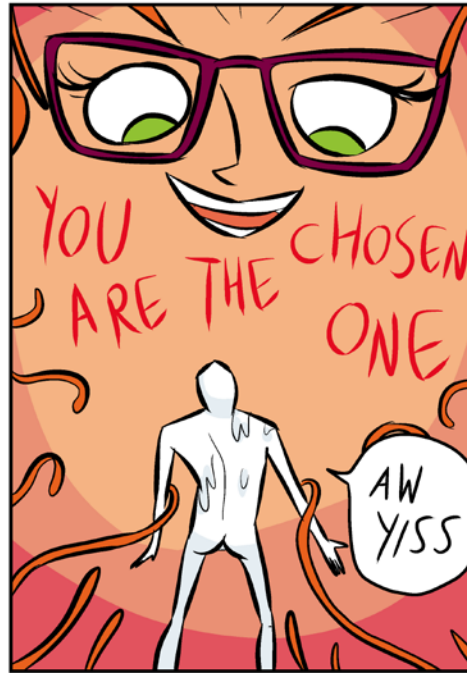
Whether the story works is entirely in the eye of the beholder. I think there are lots of good jokes and good story beats. I wish I'd drawn it as proper pages, not strips - about 2/3 through, when the Bad Machinery elements come in and the strips merge into single landscape pages, it is a definite lift. I could have pushed myself harder from the start and drawn more out of it, but that's all hindsight. I hadn't given myself more than a few hours to think about the way something was laid out for many years.

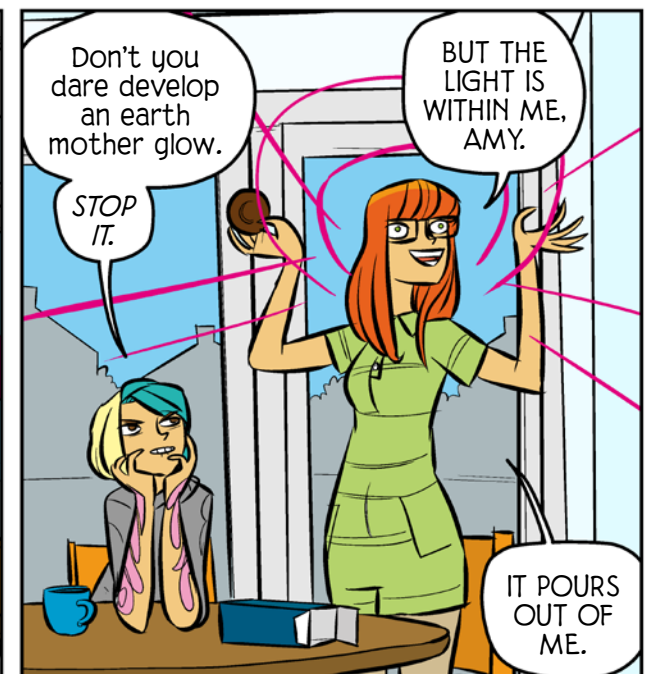
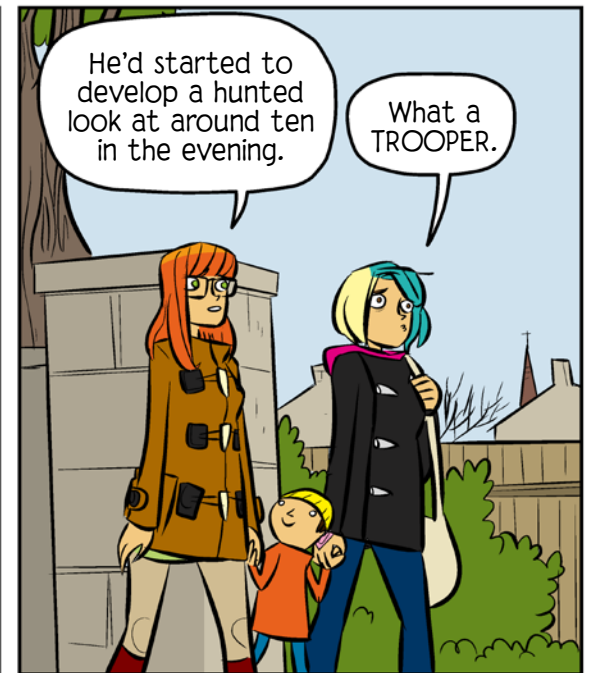
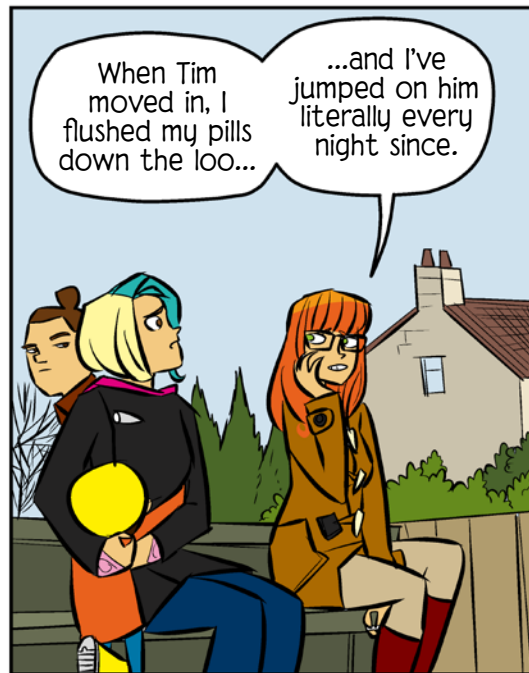
This turned out not to be the end of Tackleford webcomics, of course - in early 2018, while simultaneously writing *Giant Days* and *By Night* every month, I tried to keep things going and to push the New Bobbins format further. That didn't work. I didn't even know what to call it. I made three little stories that said nothing about anything. I just wanted to draw *something*, but I had nothing left to draw. It seemed like a failure at the time, but I was handing over 44 pages of script every month to other writers. The well was dry.

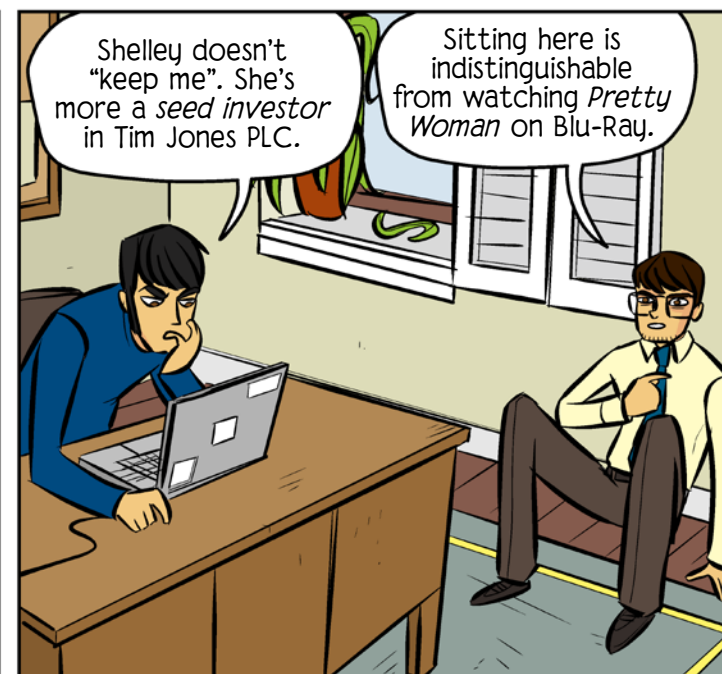
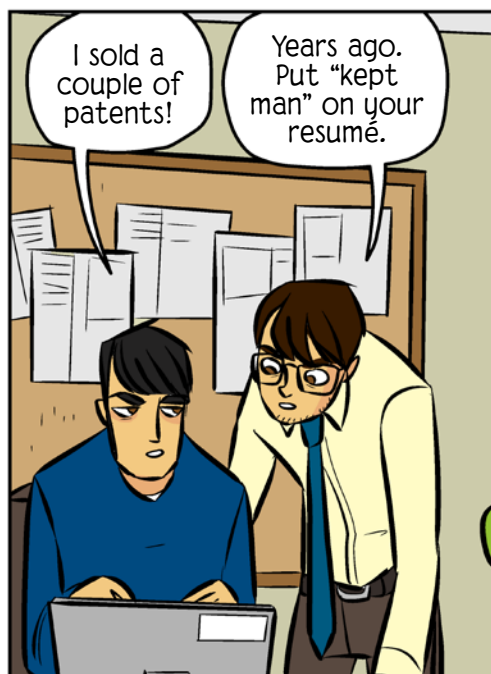
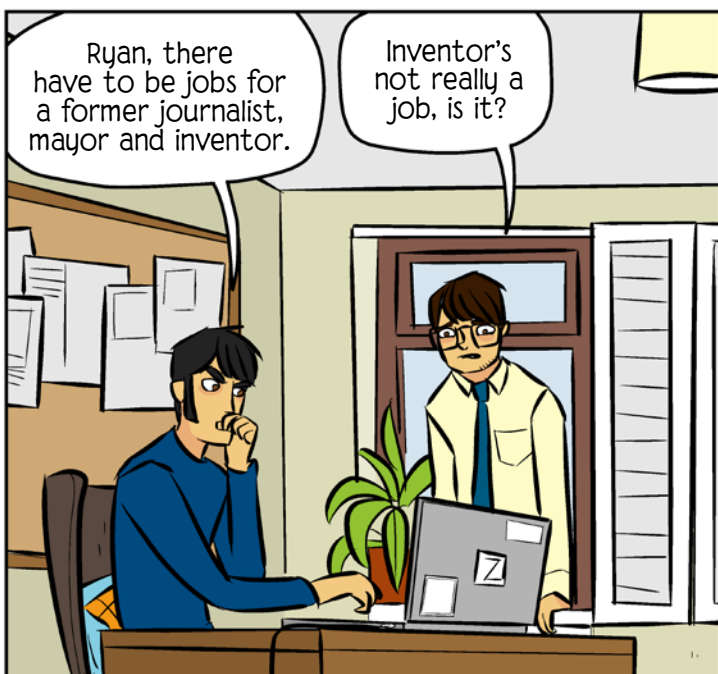
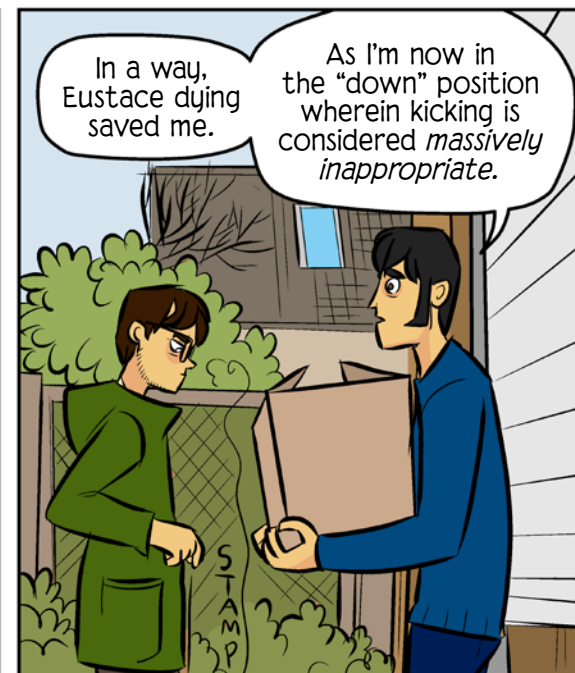
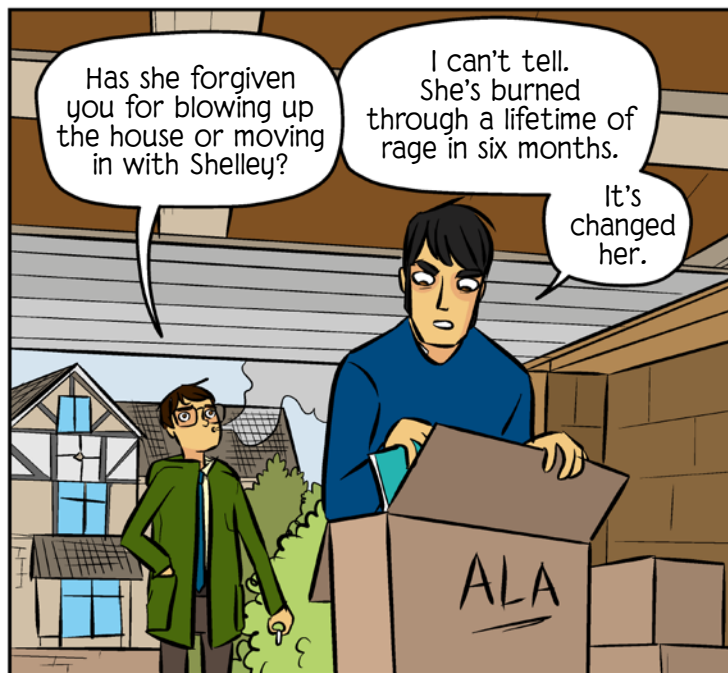
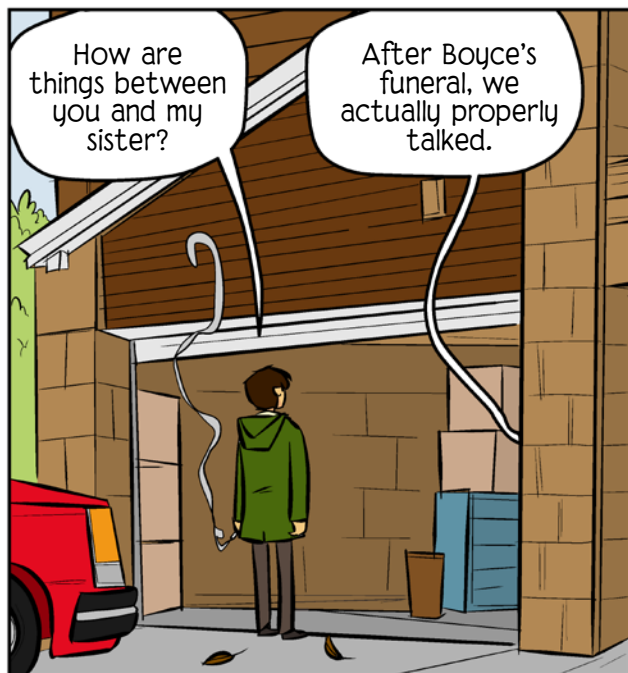
I finally conceded that I needed a break and laid down my pen.

- JA

1st trimester









Tim, could you take Scout for half term? I've got a big job on.



Yes, that's fine.

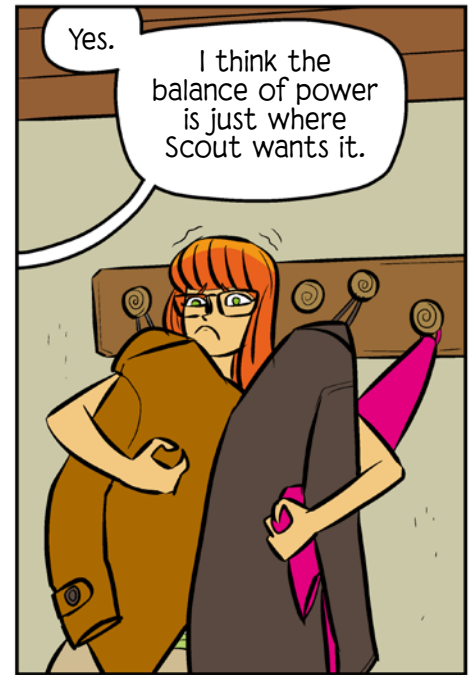


You don't need to ask the red queen's permission?



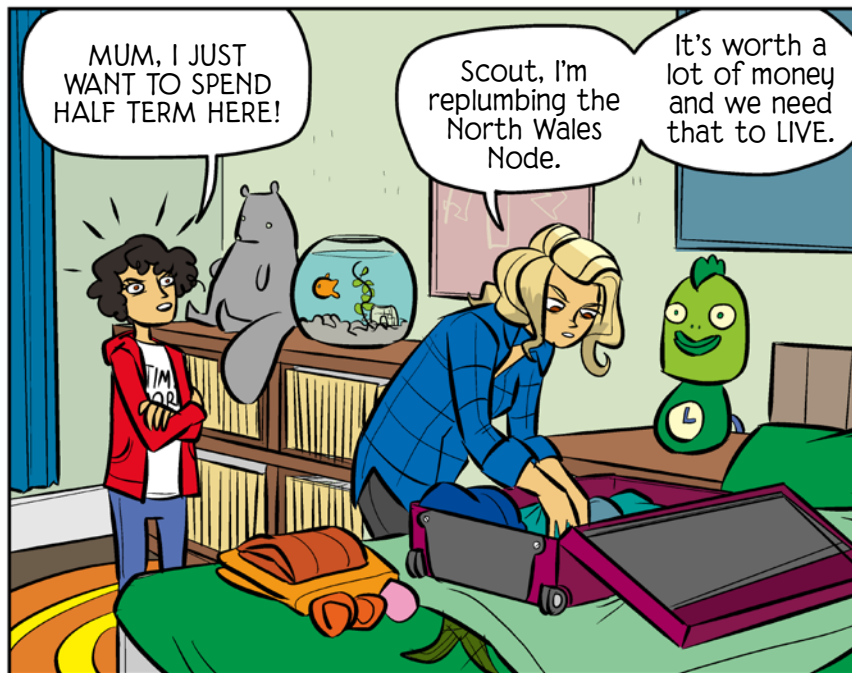
No. Shelley, um, loves having Scout over.

They have a... *stable* relationship now.



Yes.

I think the balance of power is just where Scout wants it.



MUM, I JUST WANT TO SPEND HALF TERM HERE!

Scout, I'm replumbing the North Wales Node.

It's worth a lot of money and we need that to LIVE.



You'll have a nice time with Daddy and-

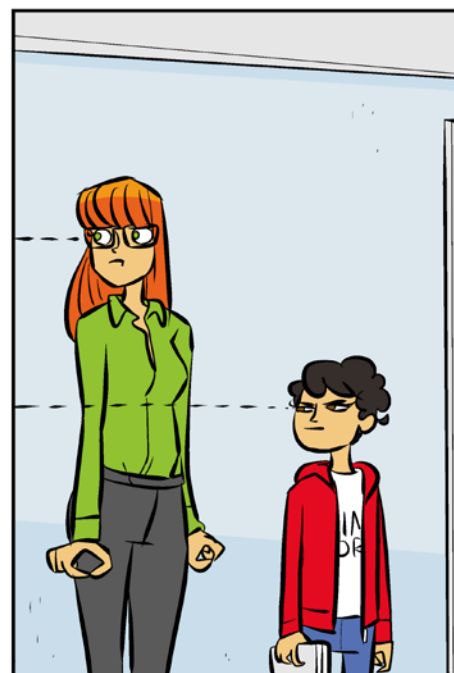
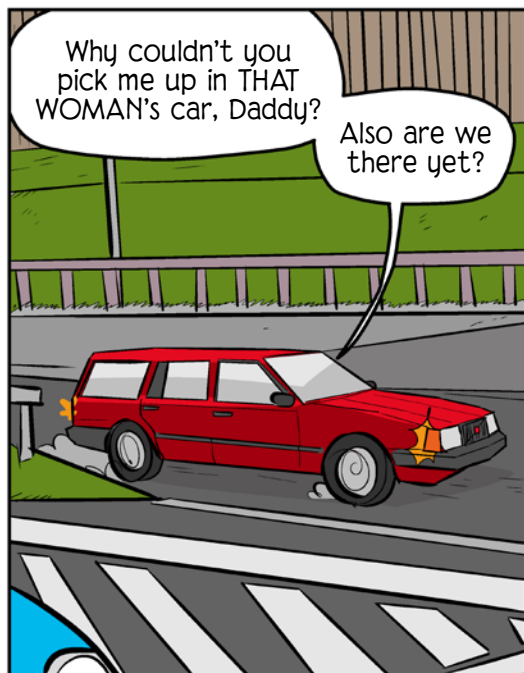
THAT WOMAN.

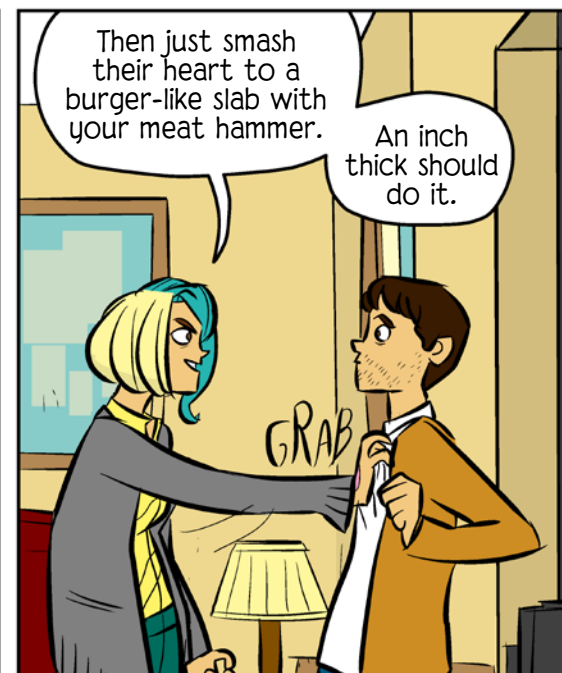
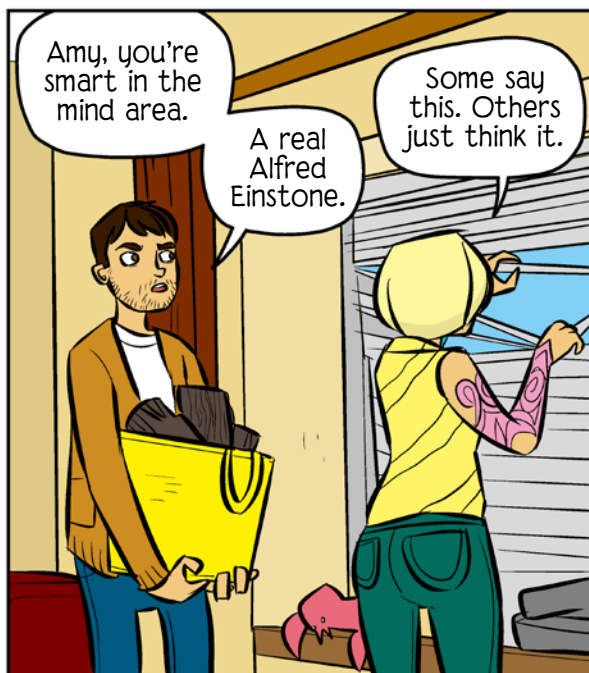
Don't call her that.

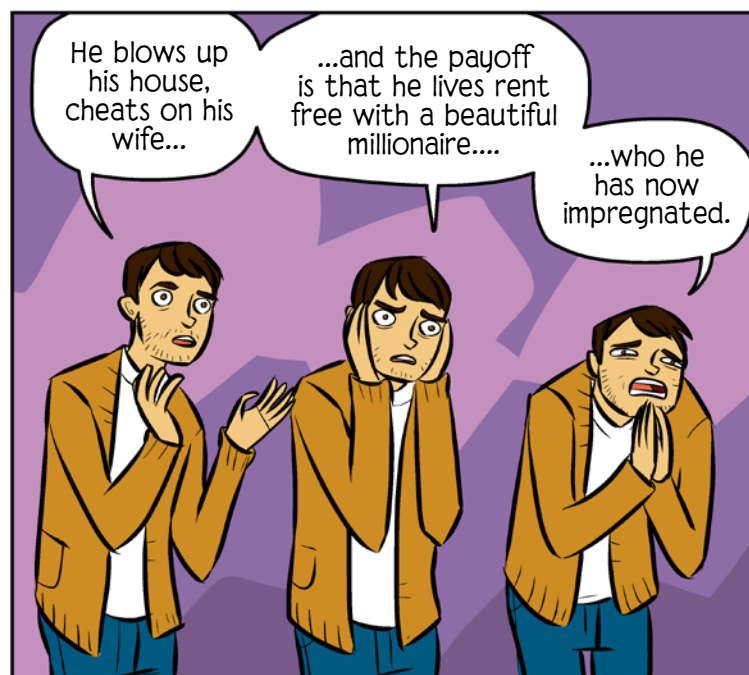
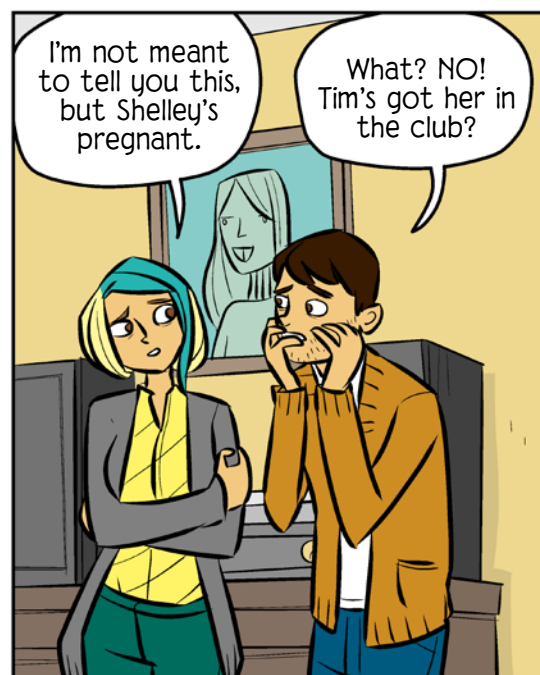
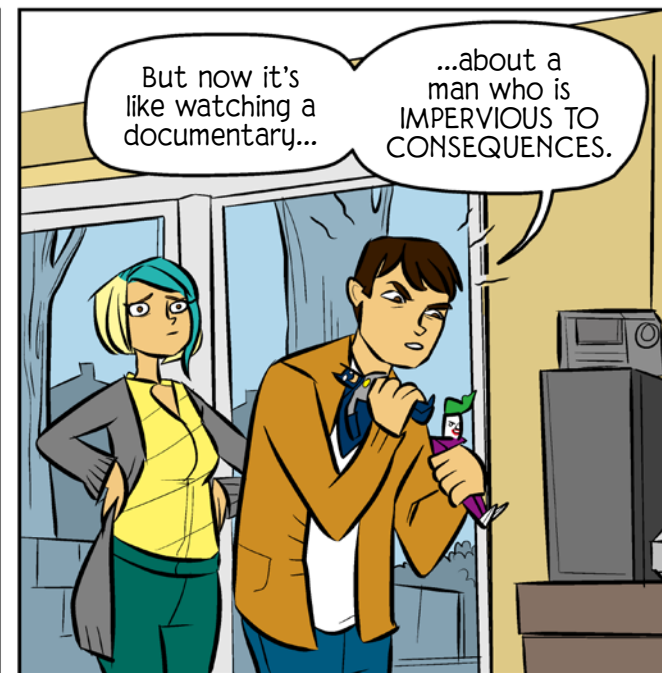


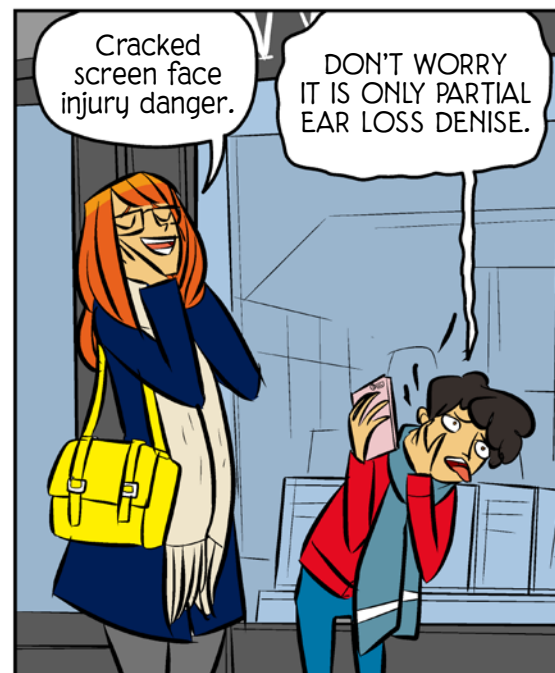
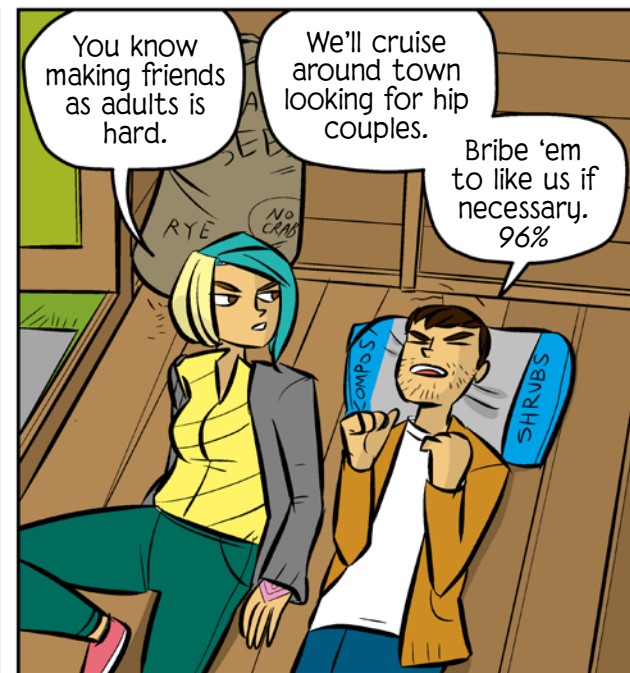
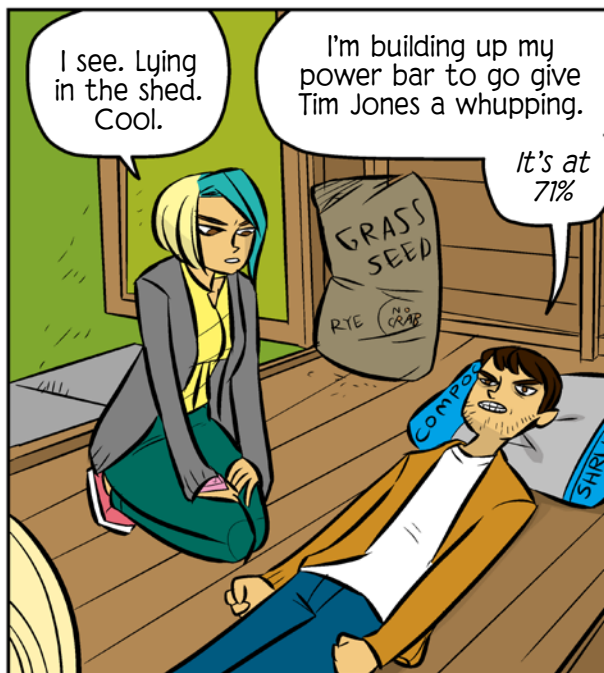
It's what *you* call her, Mummy.

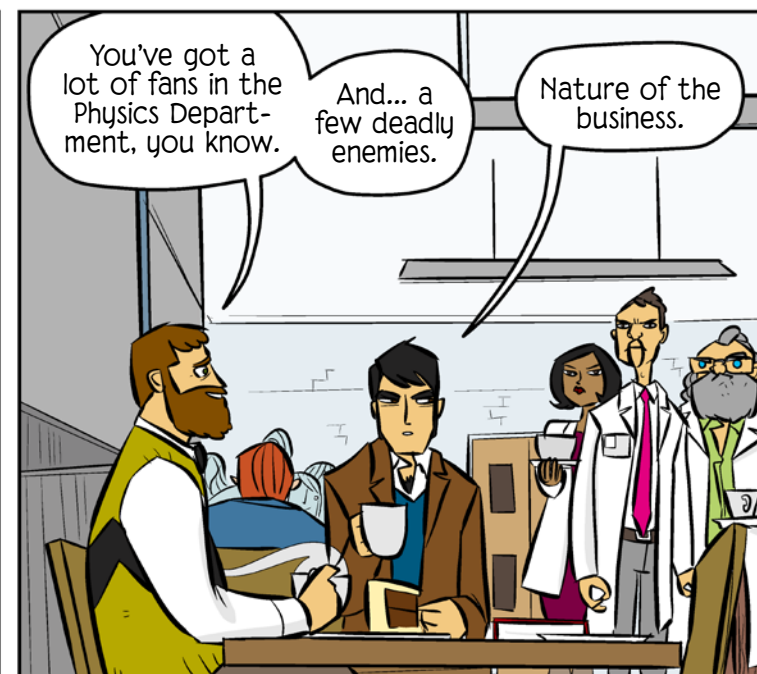
Mummy needs to put her feelings somewhere.

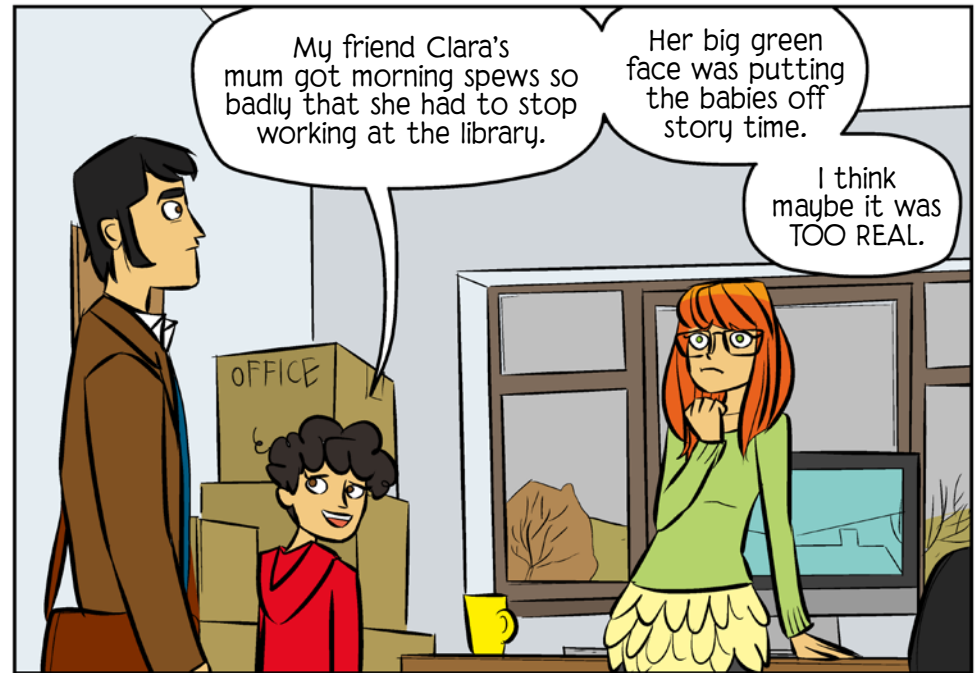


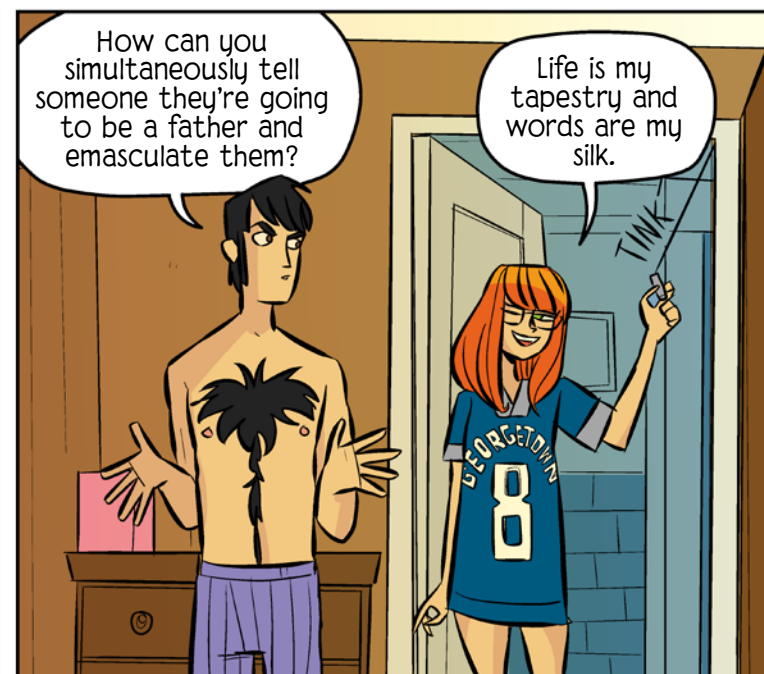
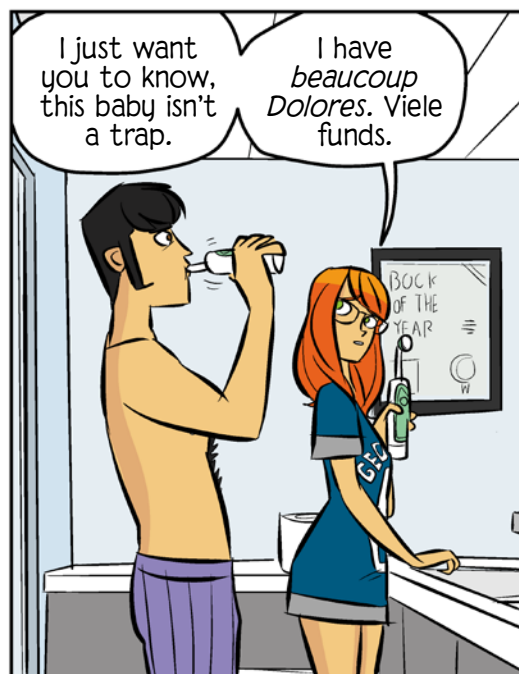
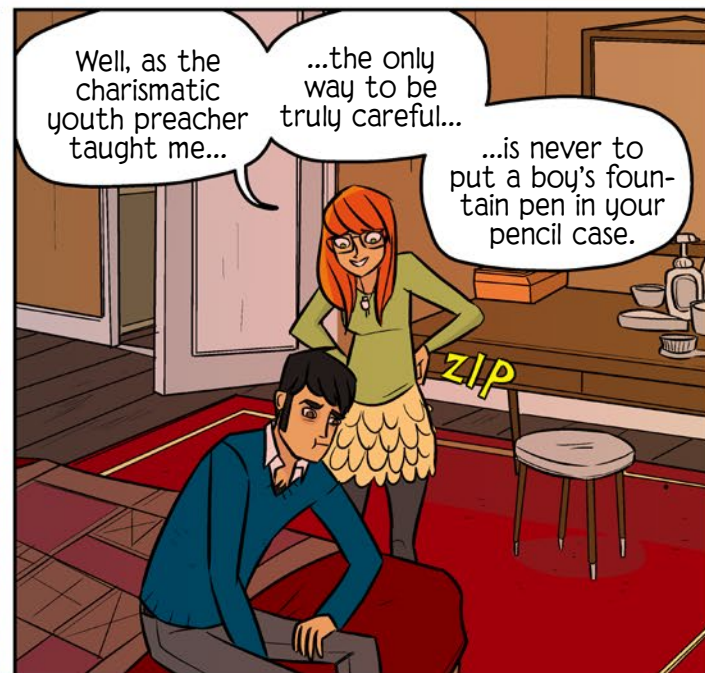




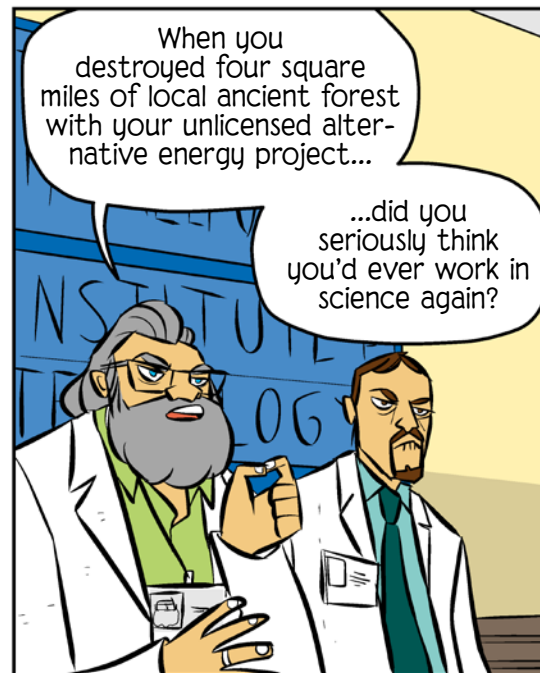
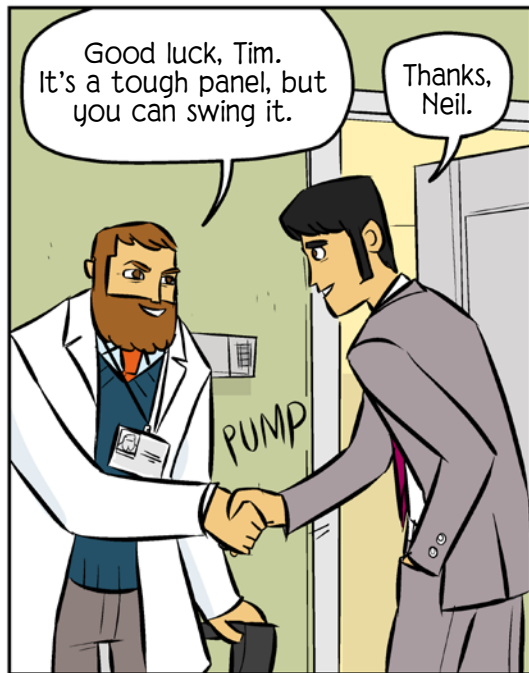


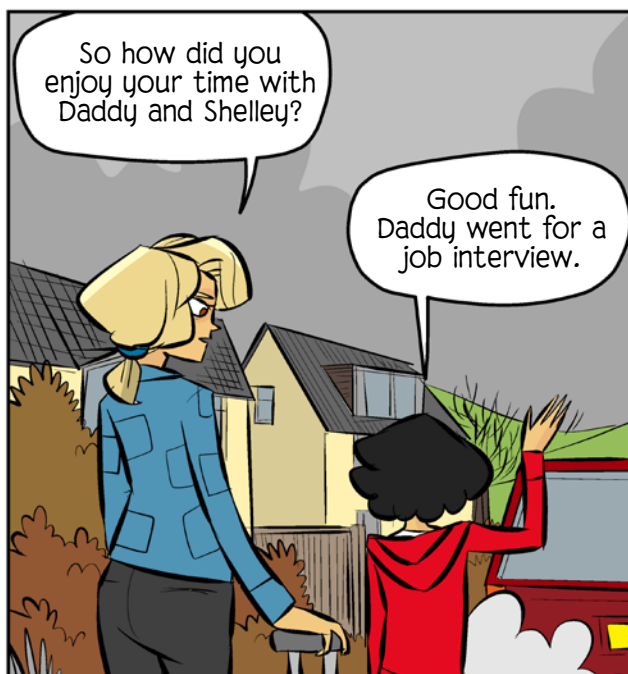


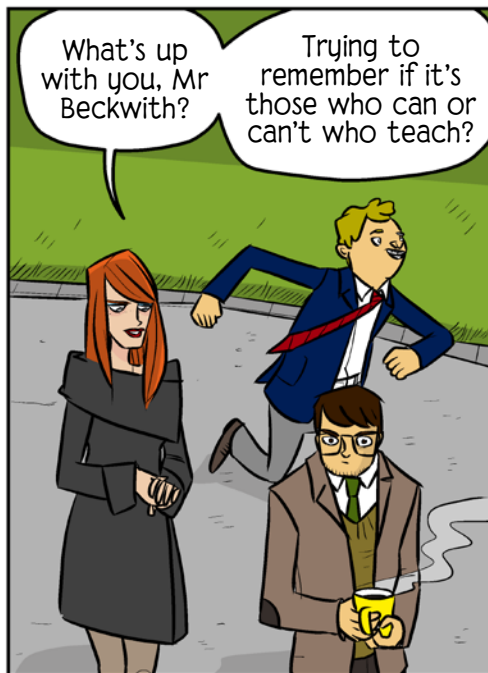
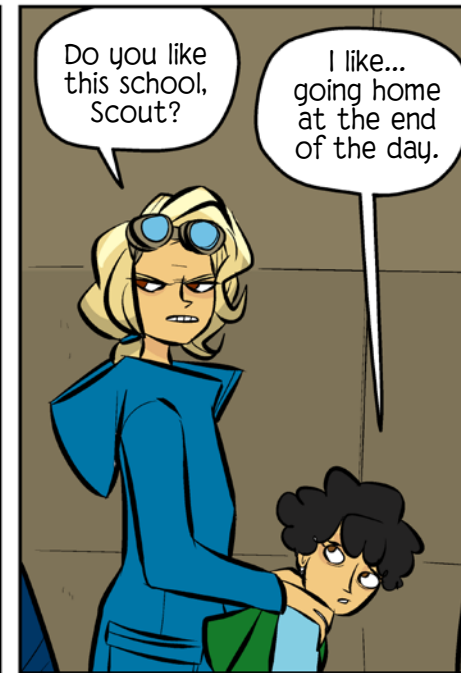
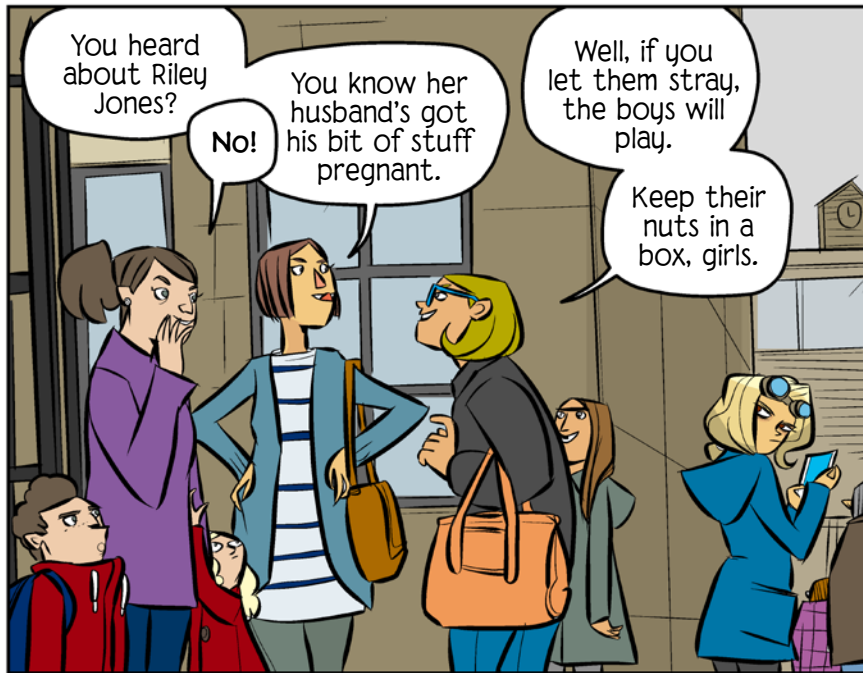




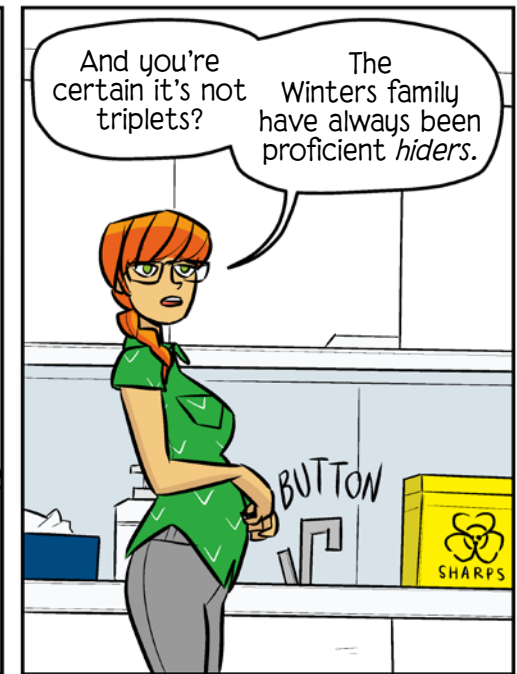


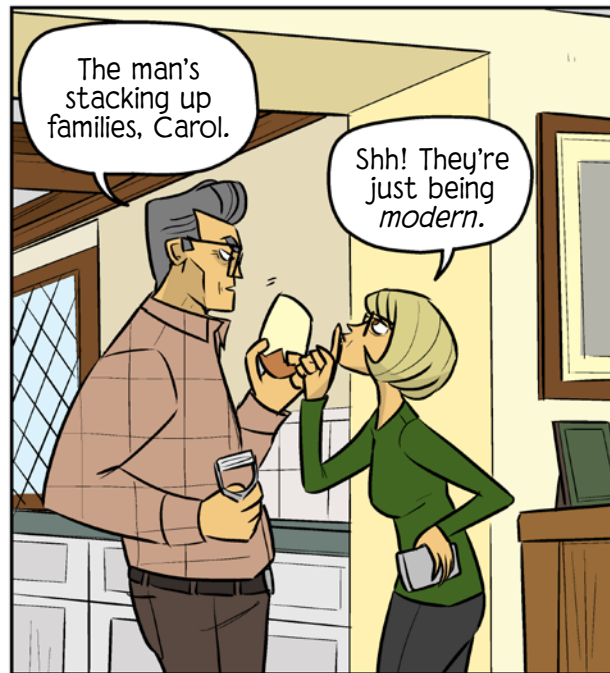
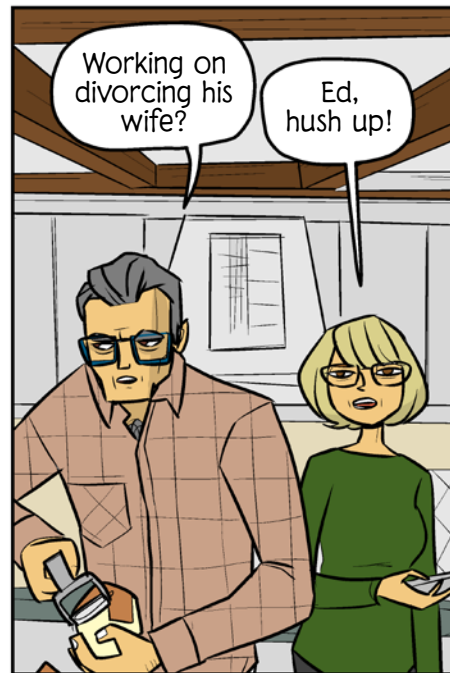
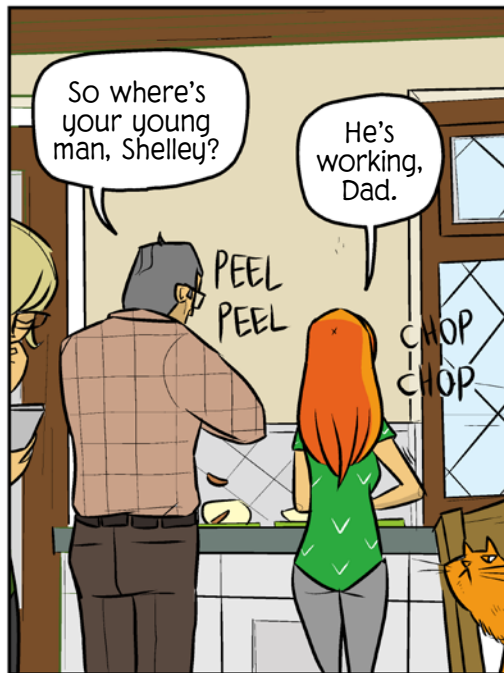


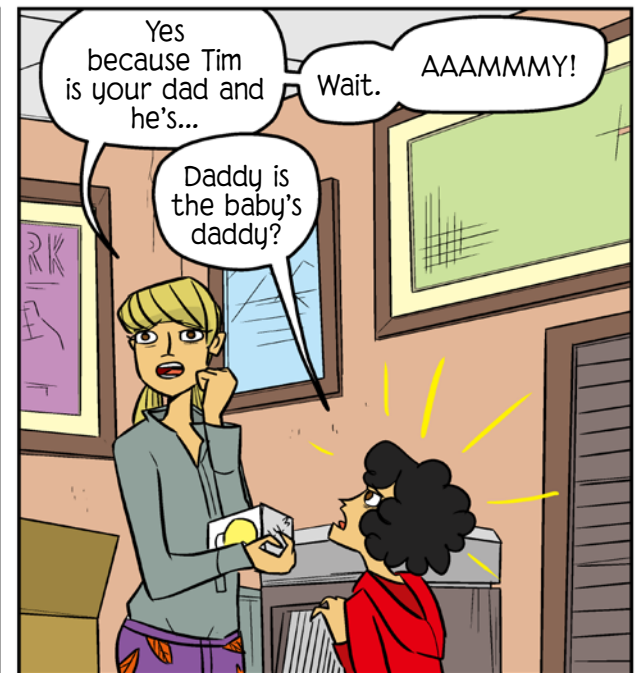
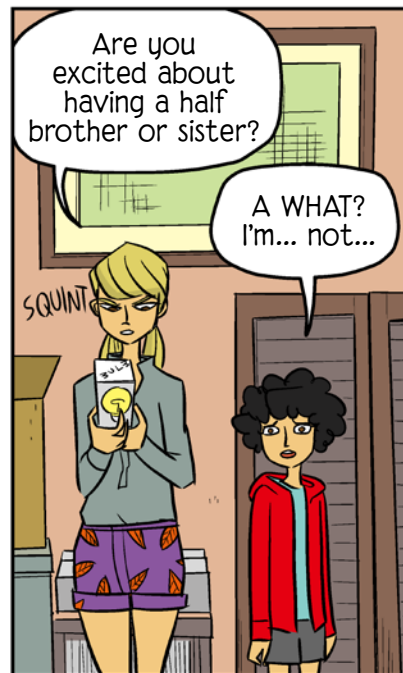


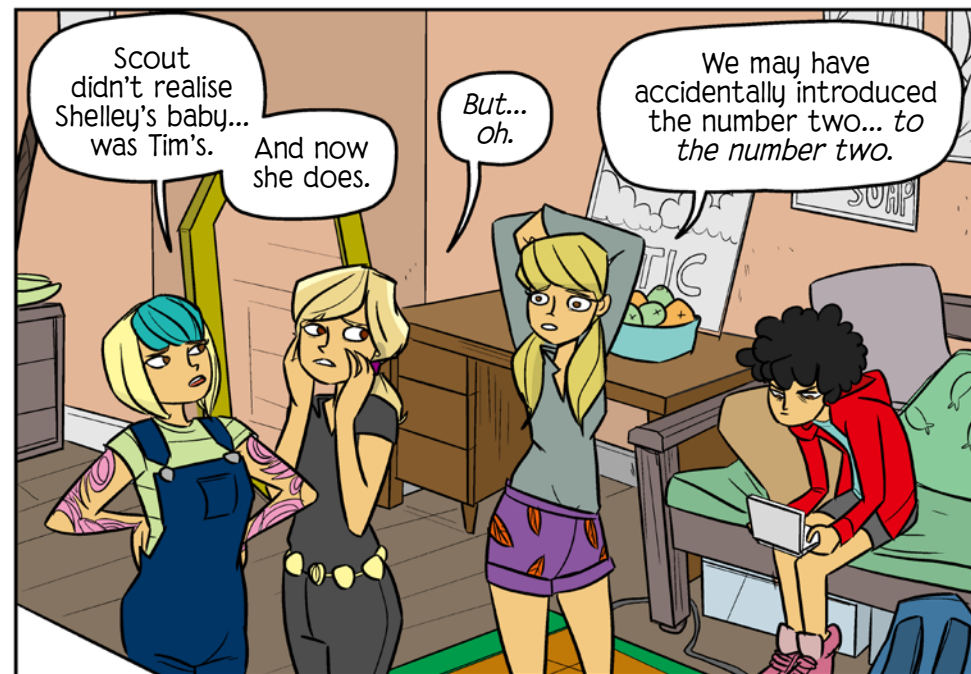
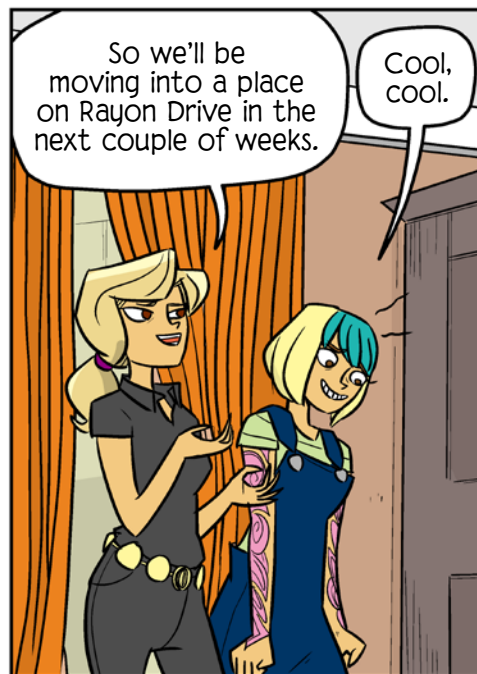


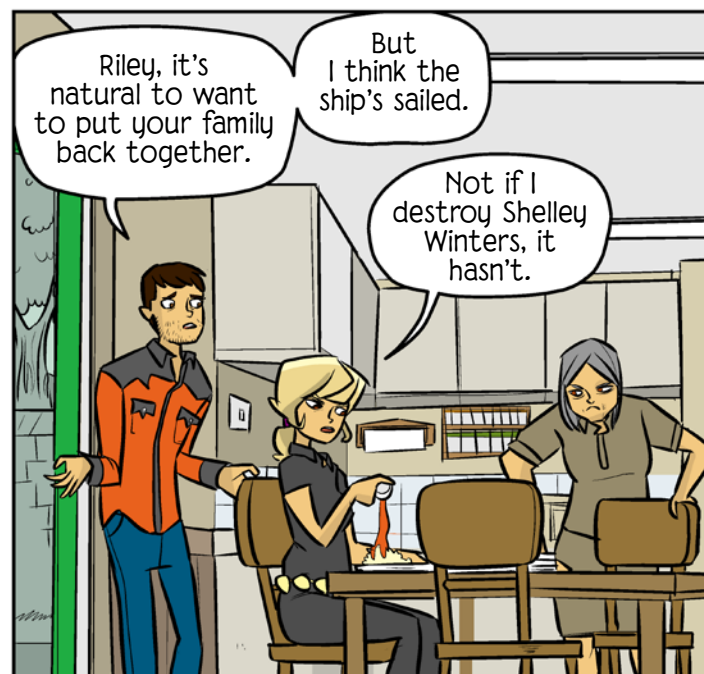
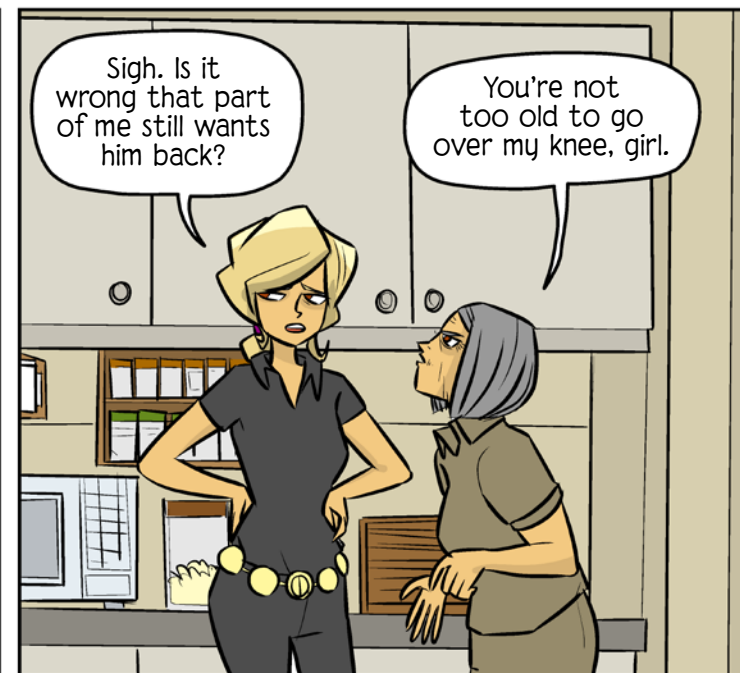
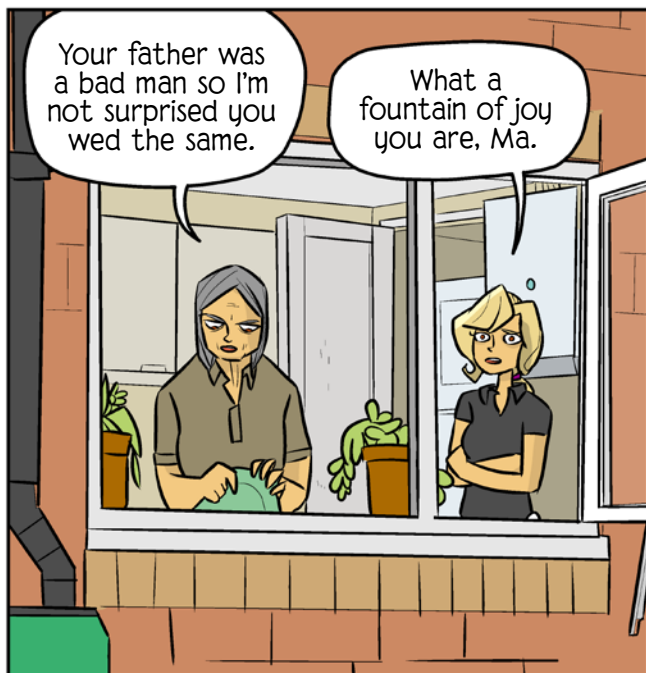
2nd trimester



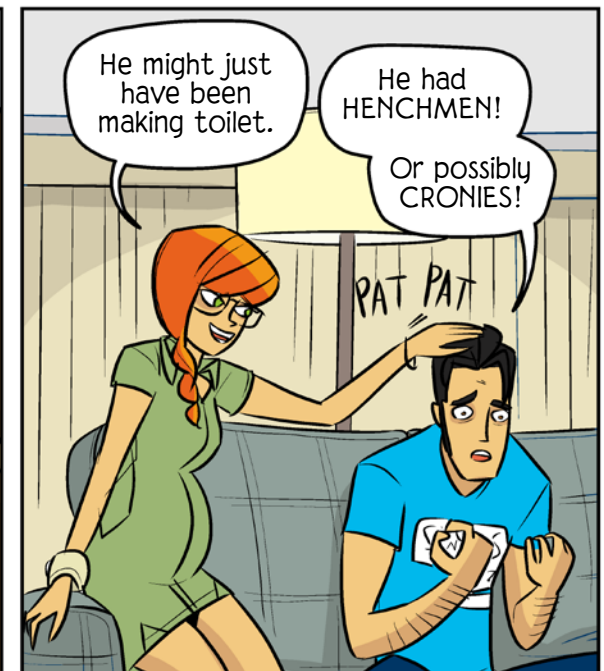
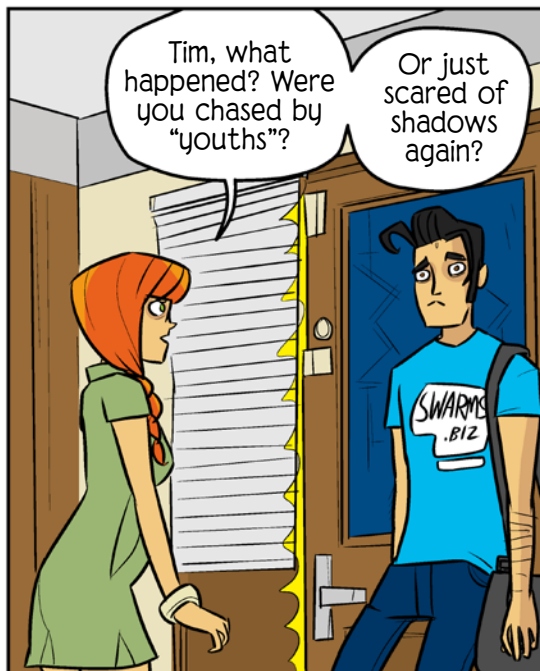


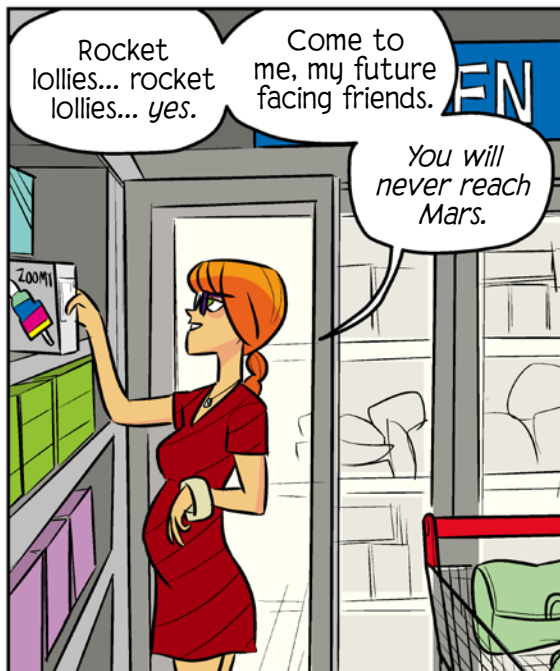
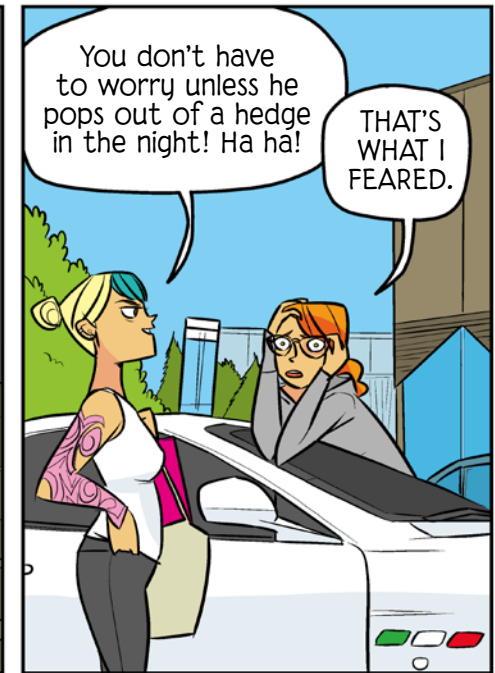
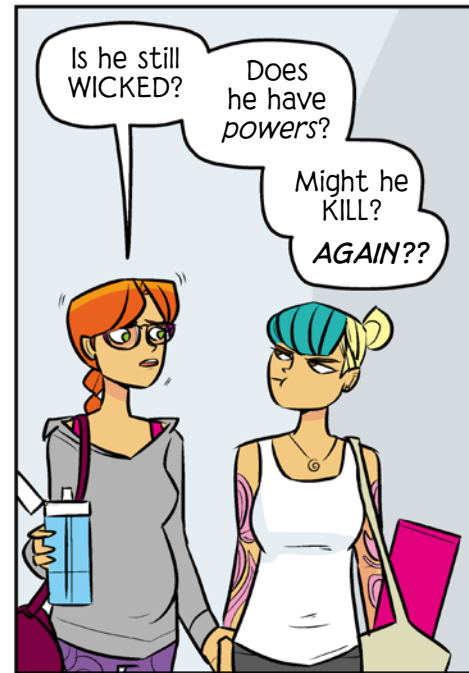
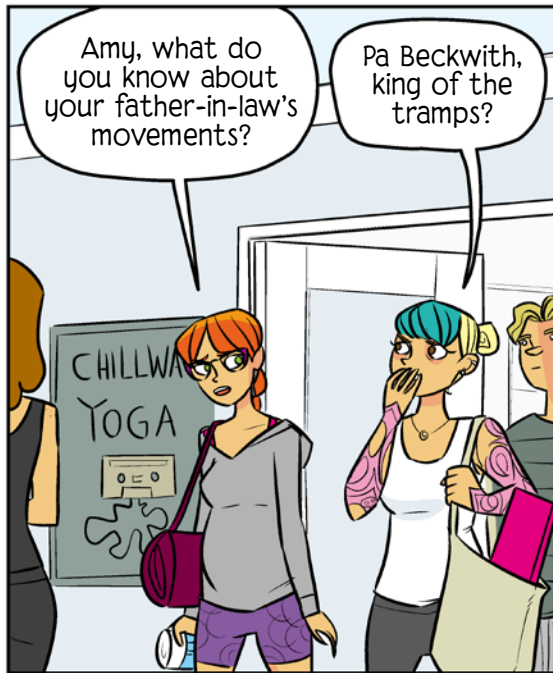






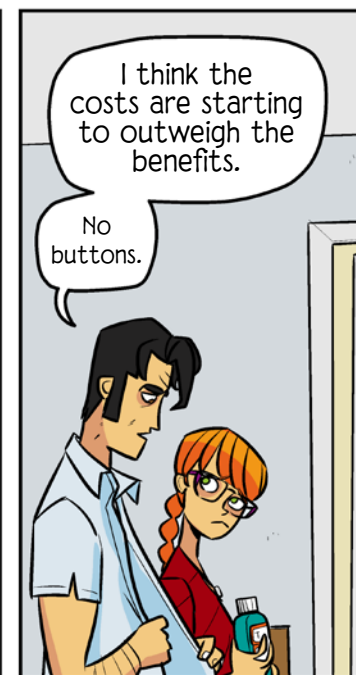
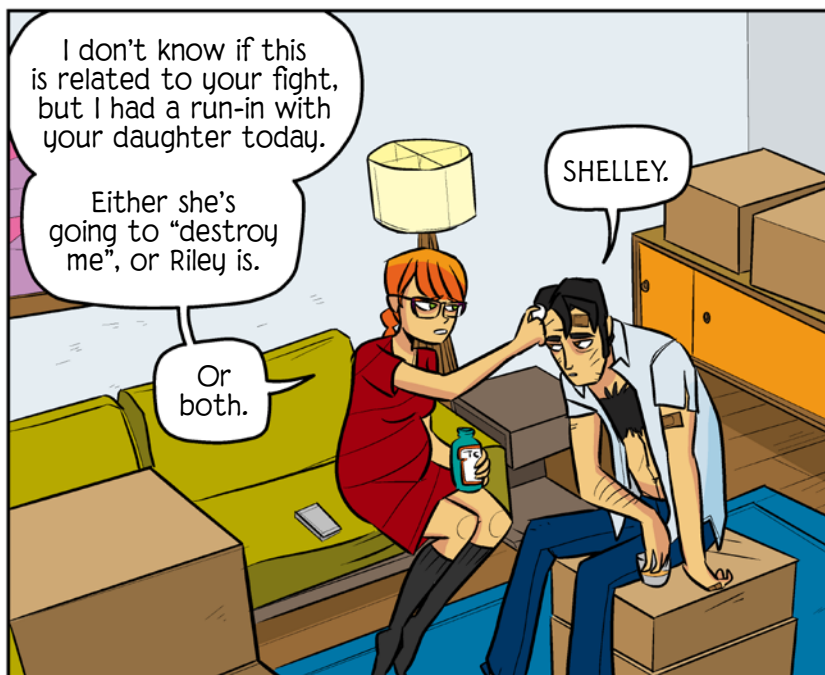
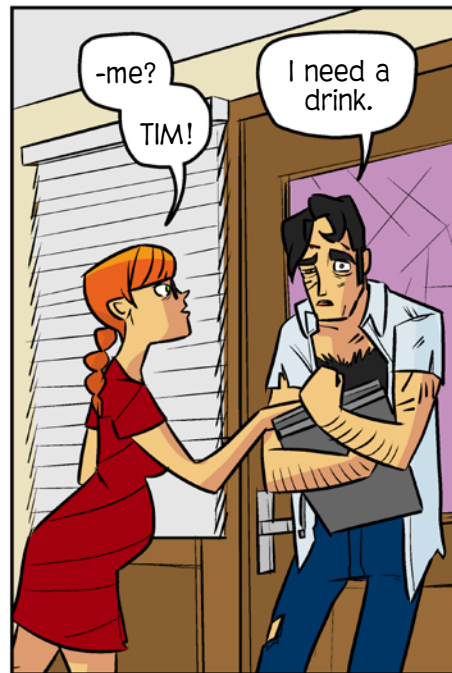


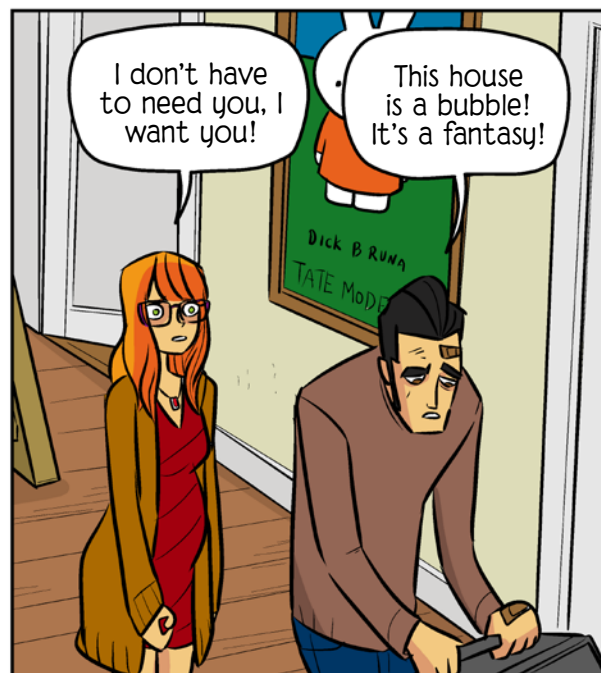


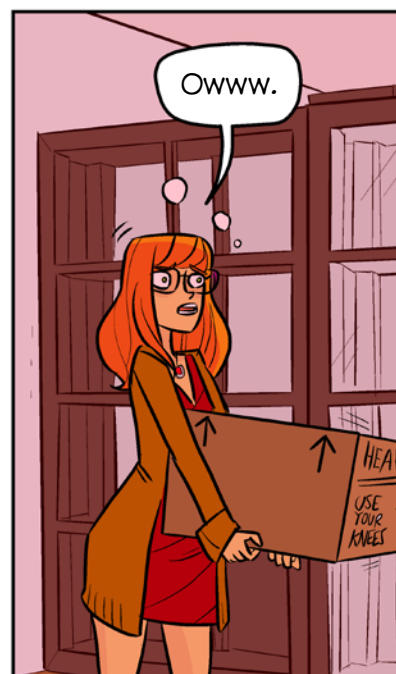


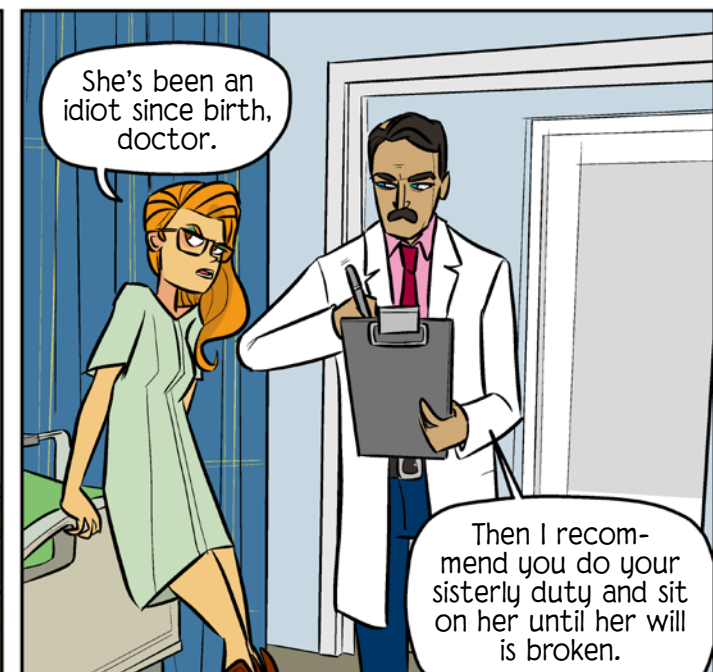
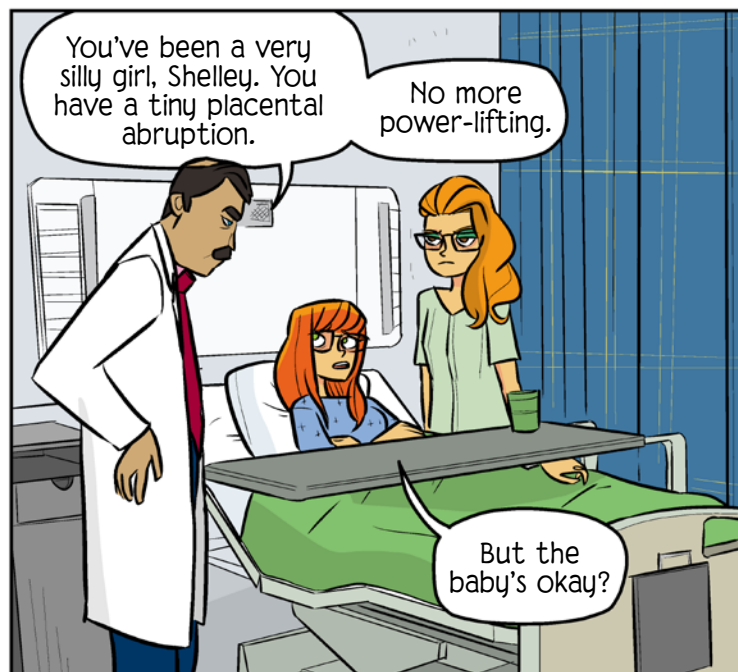
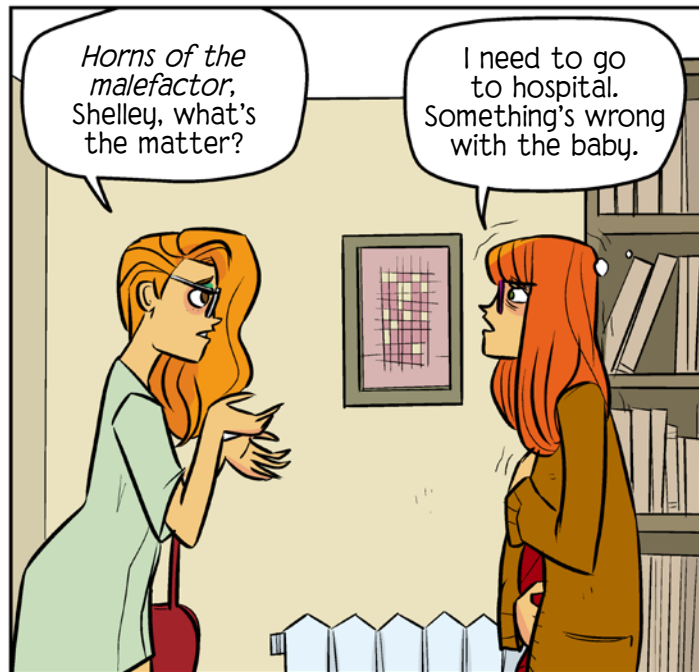
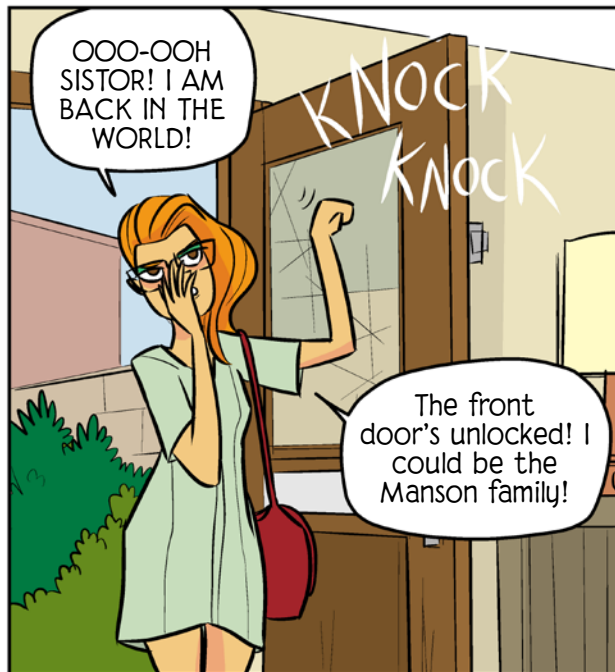


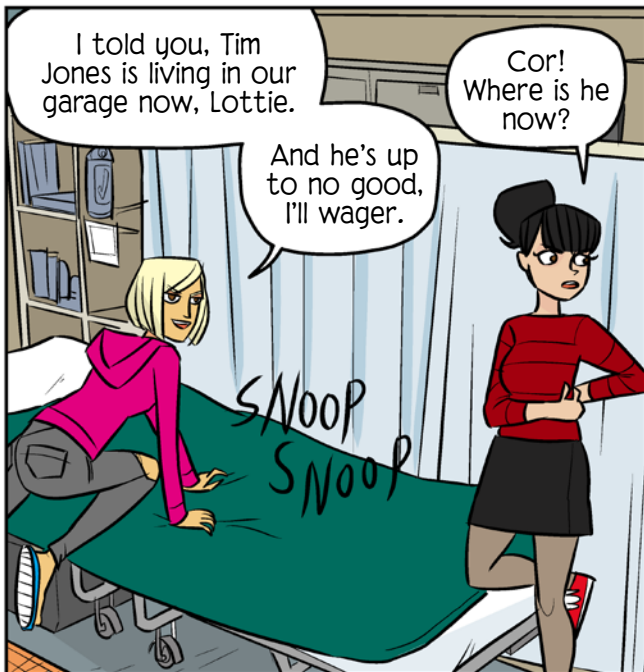
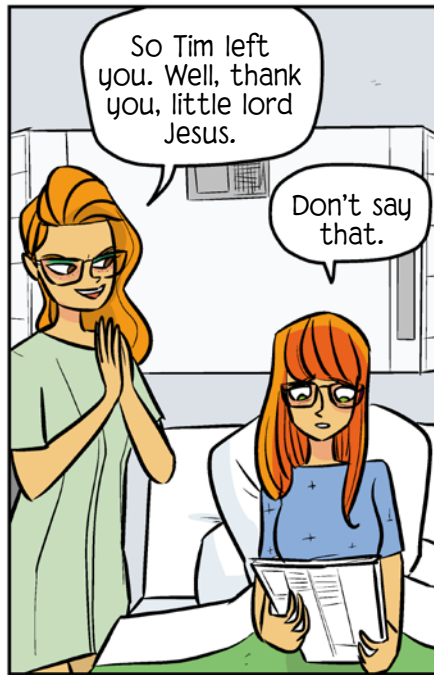


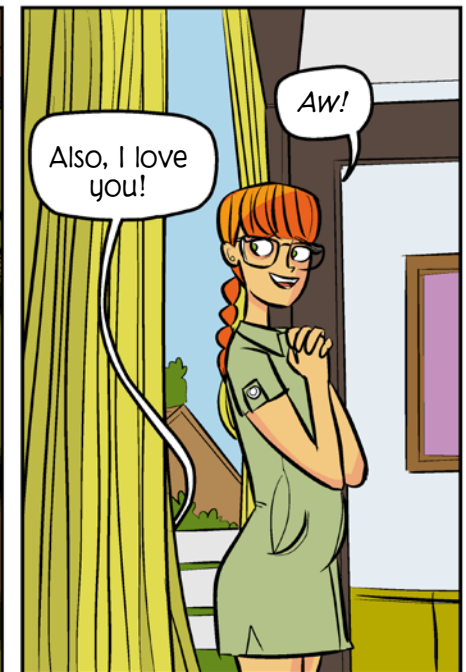
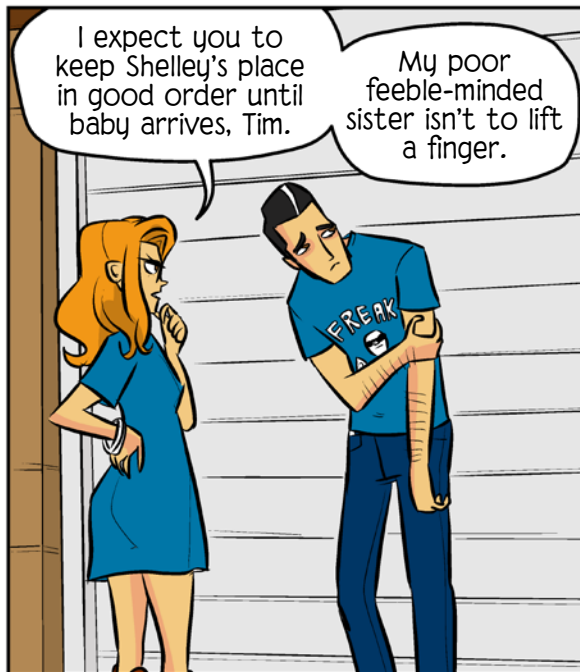


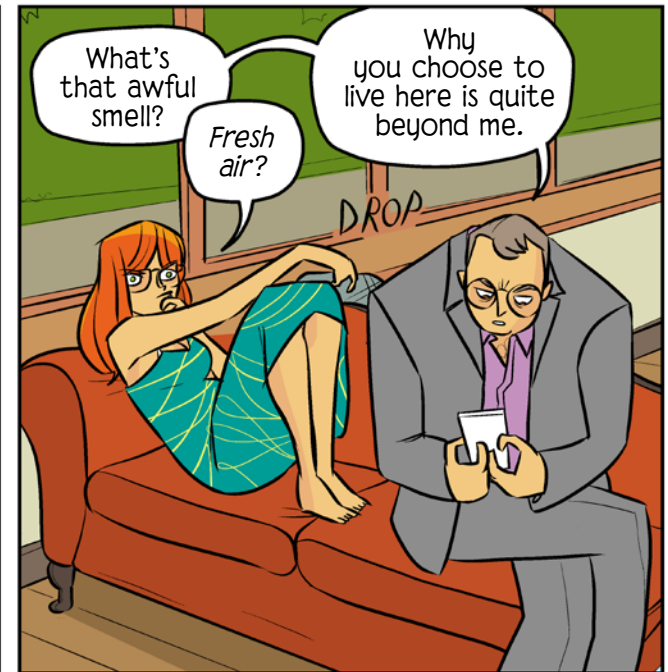
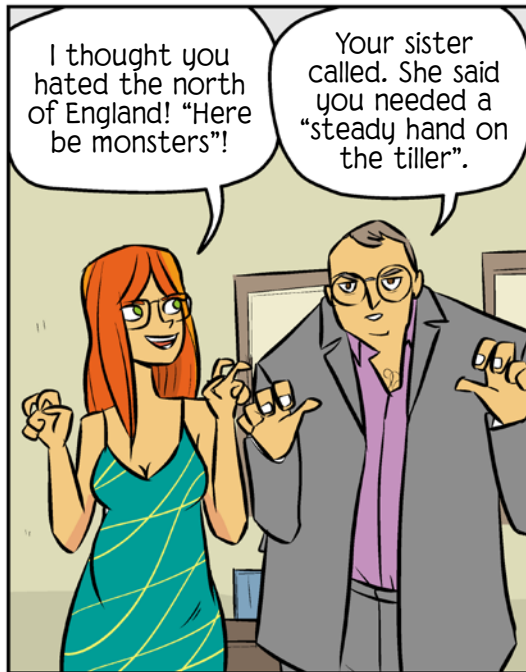






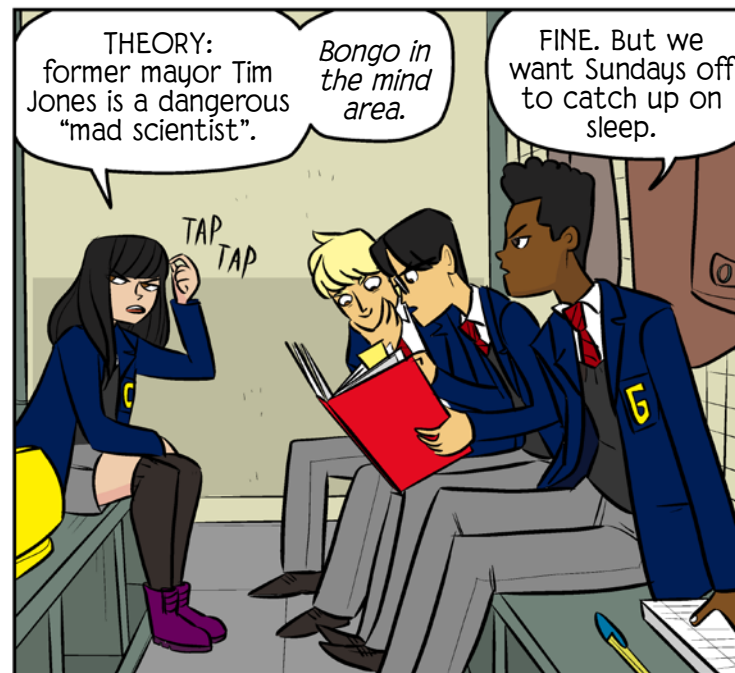


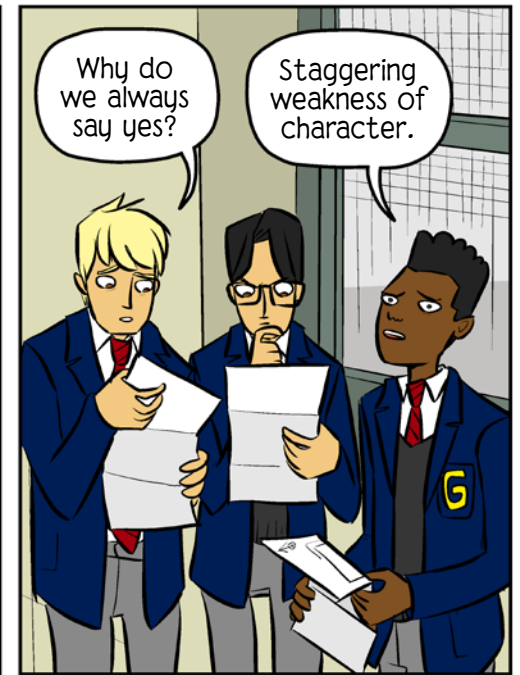
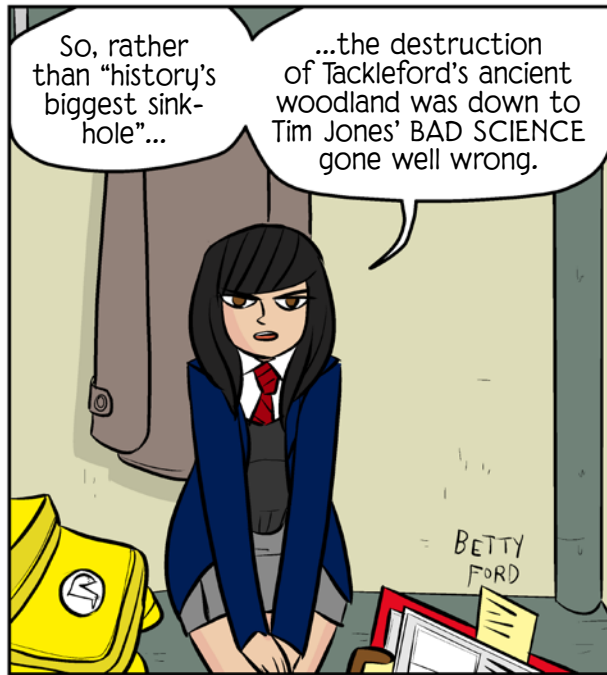


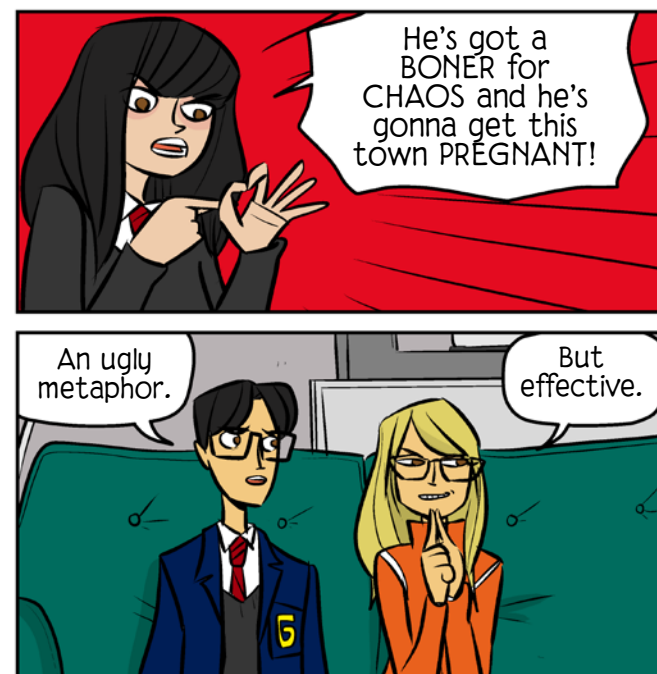
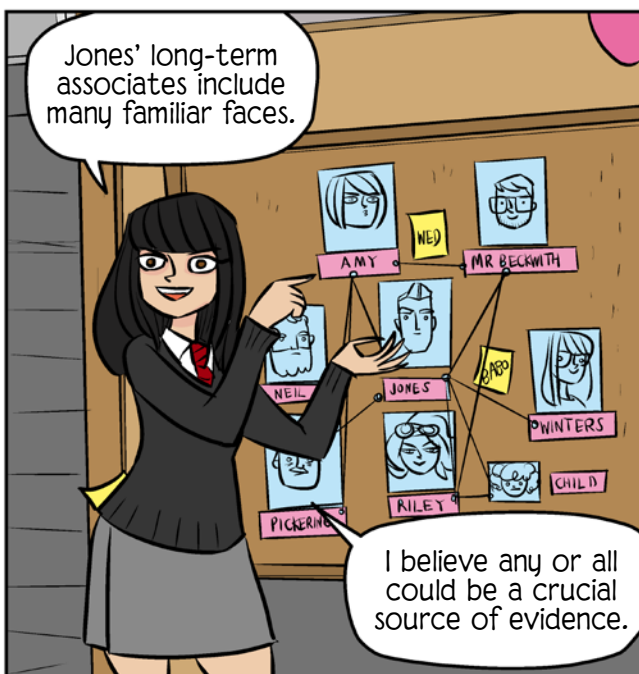
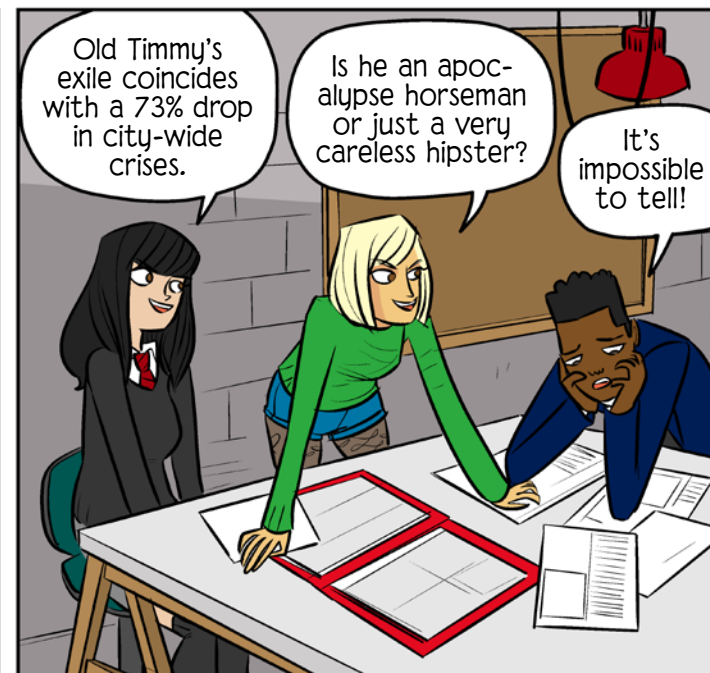


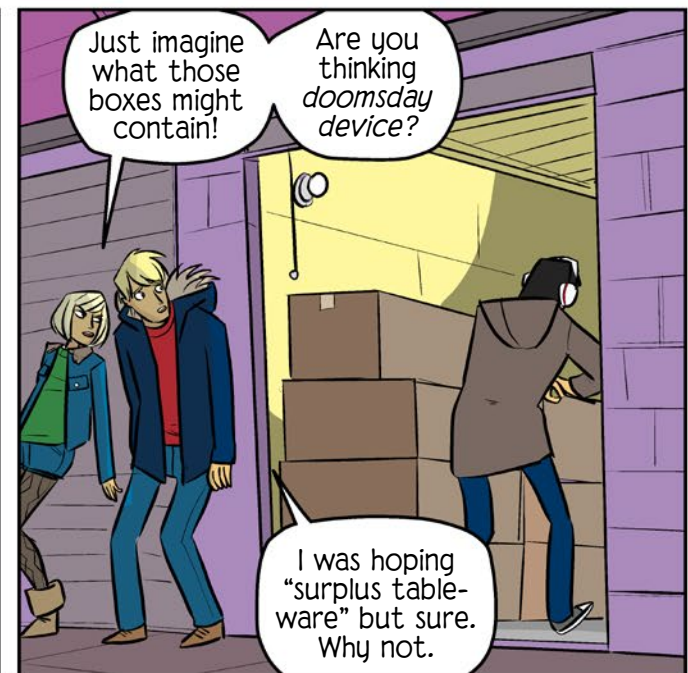
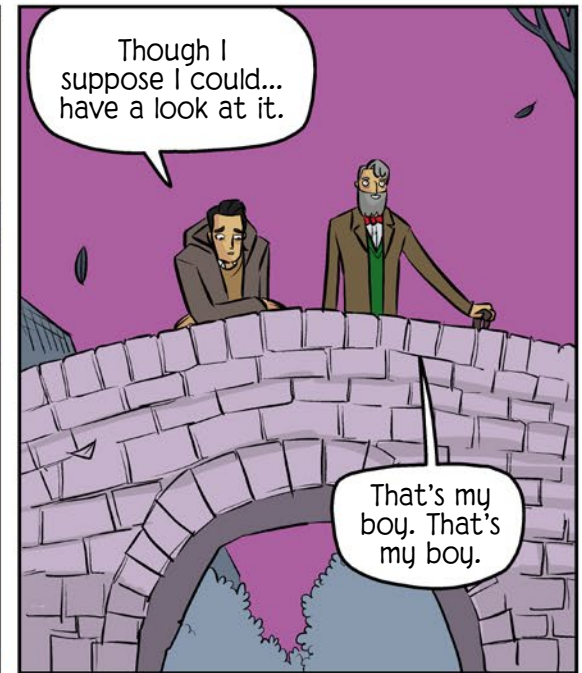


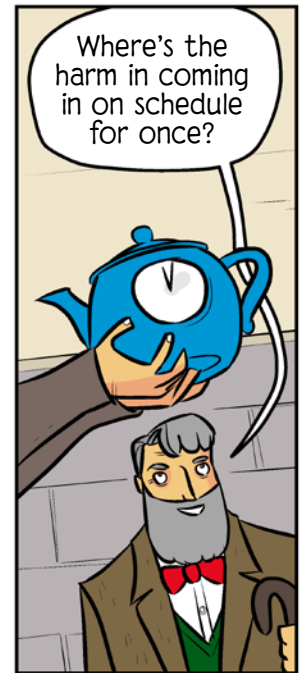
3rd trimester

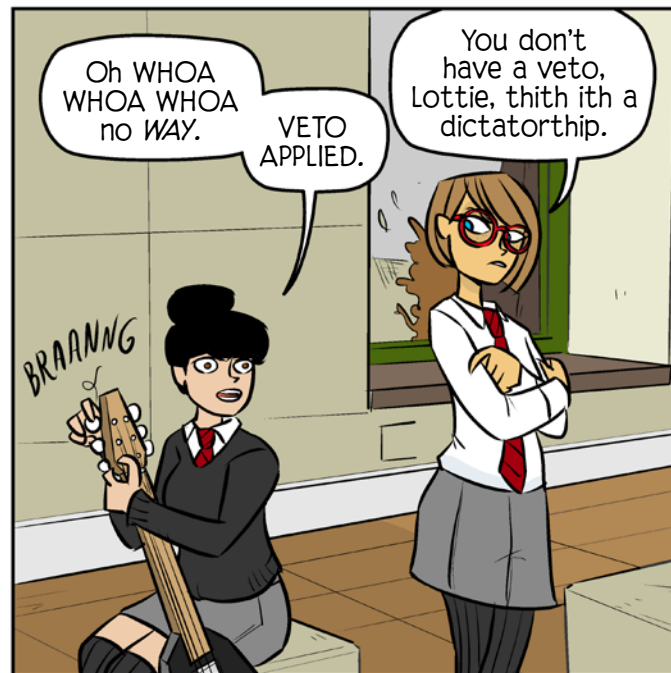
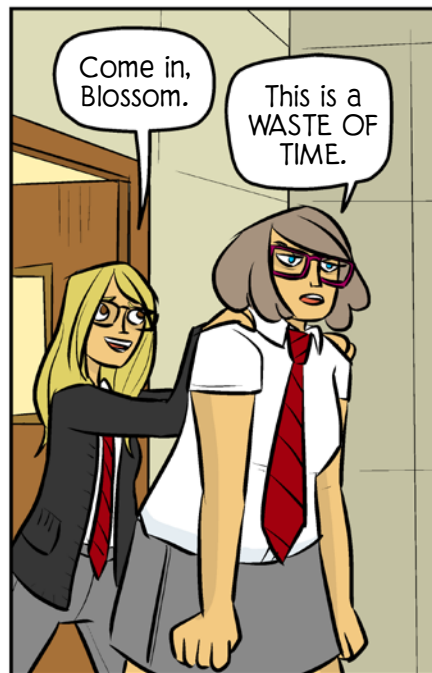
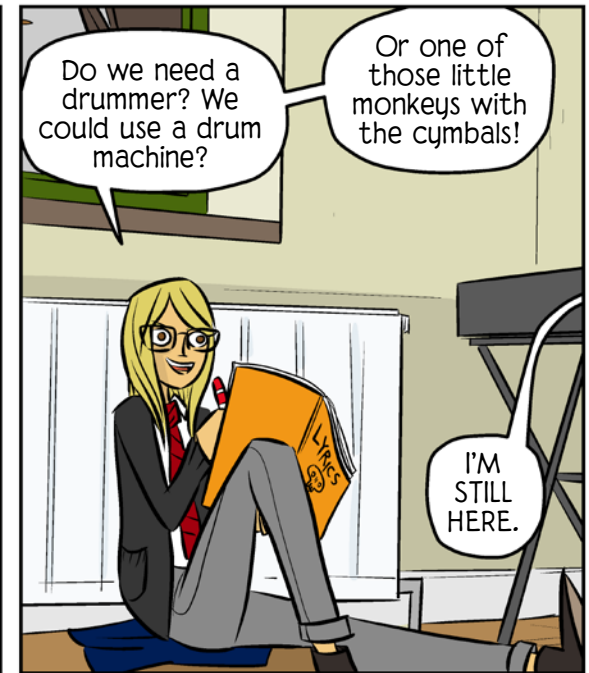
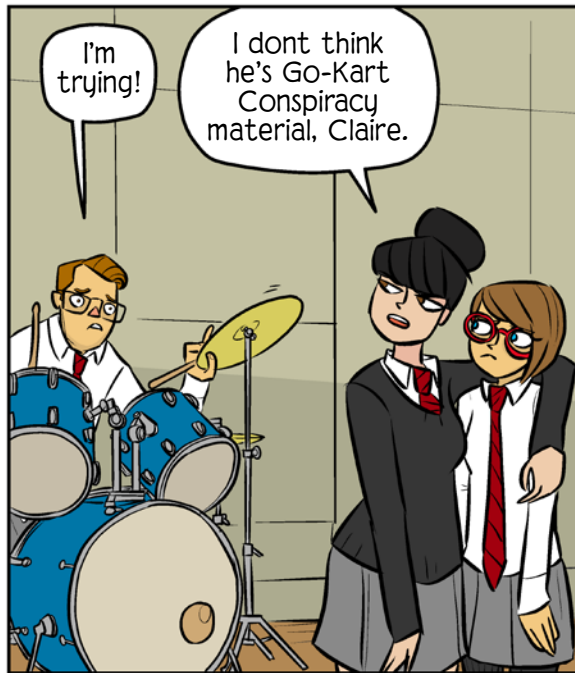
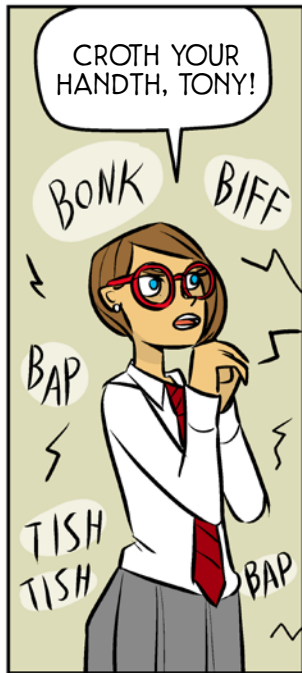


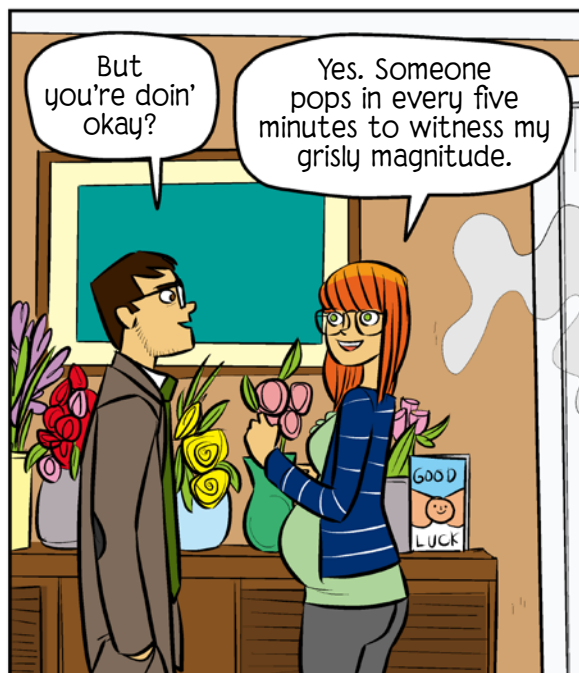
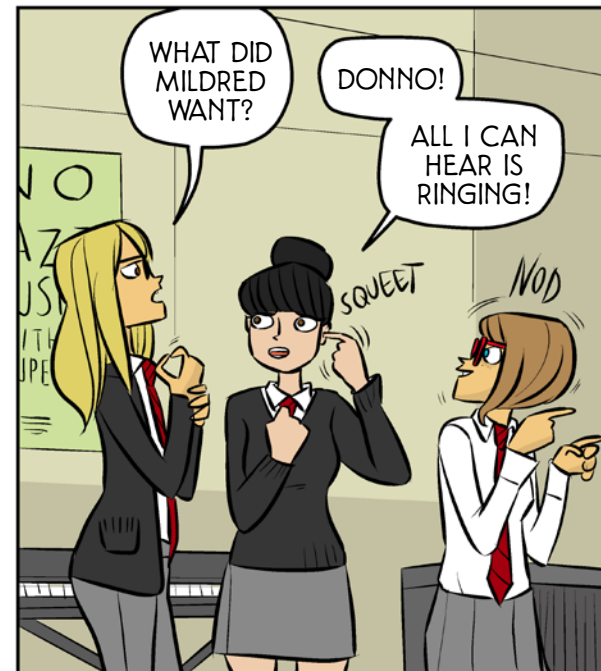
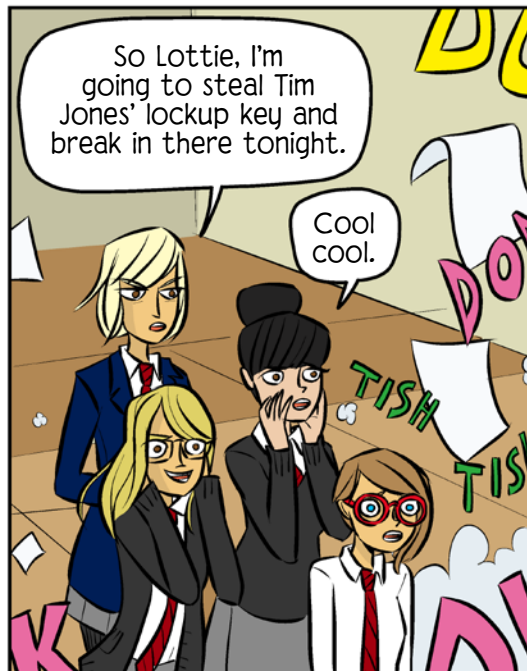


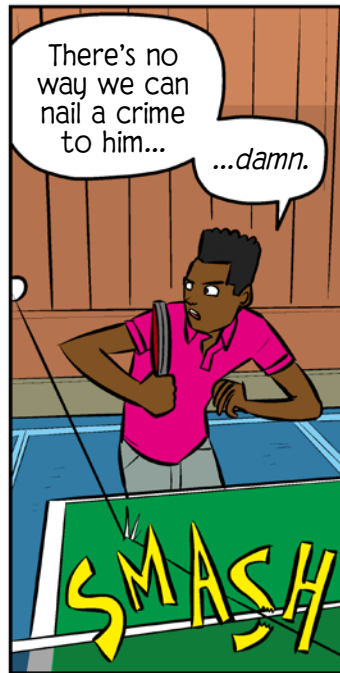
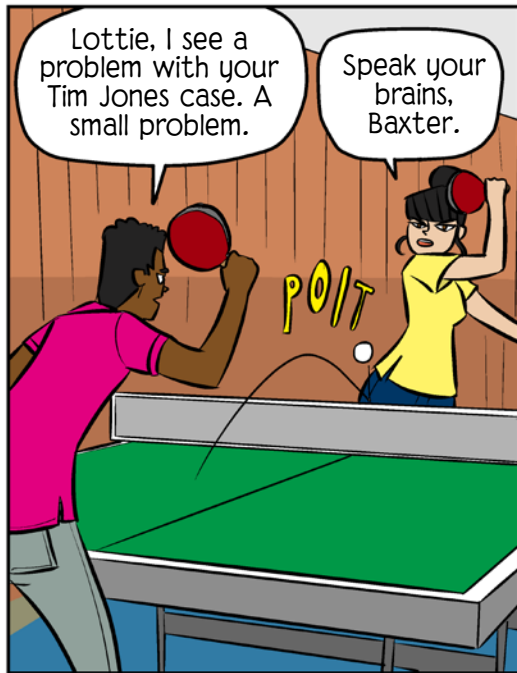


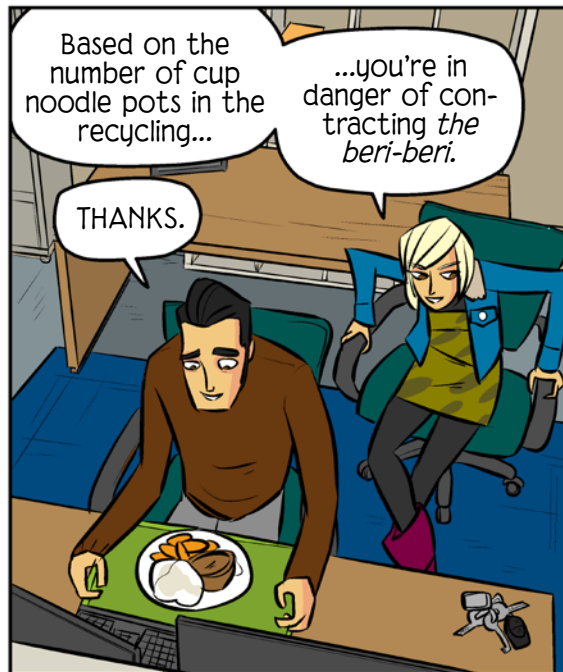


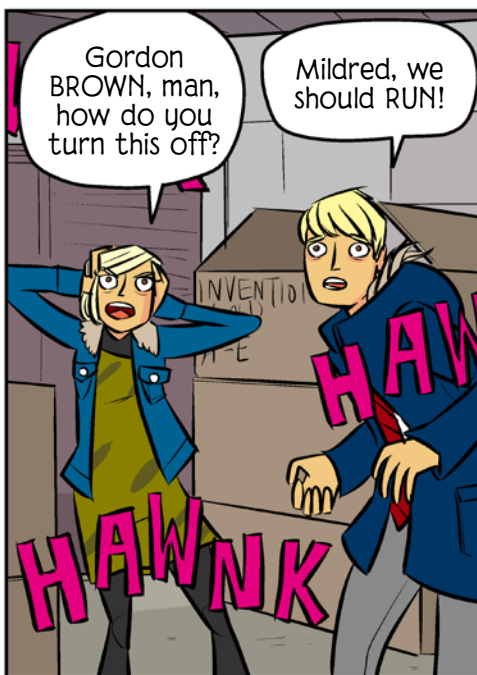
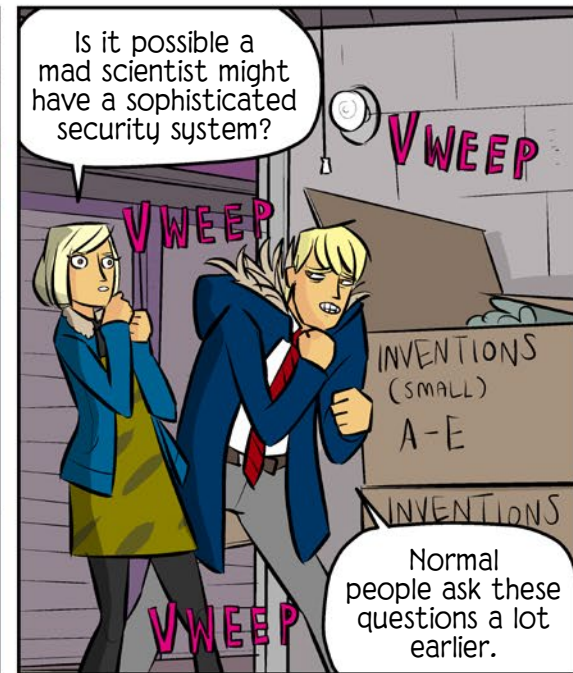


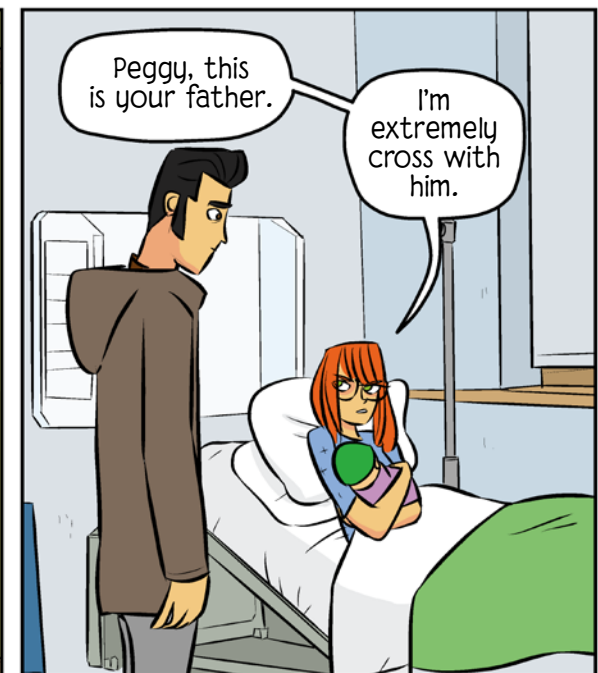


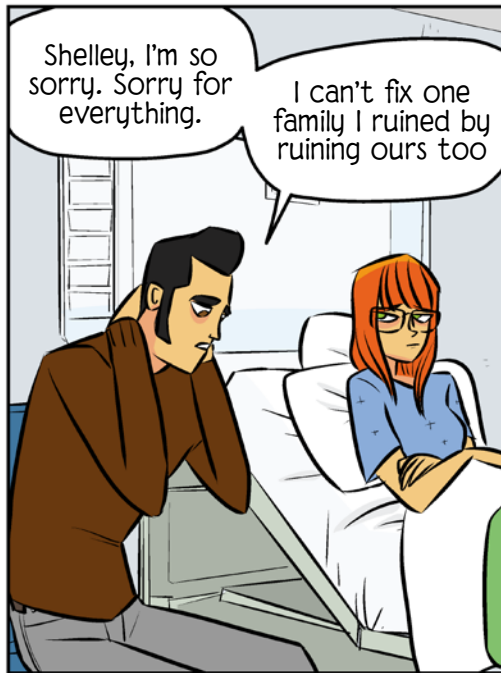


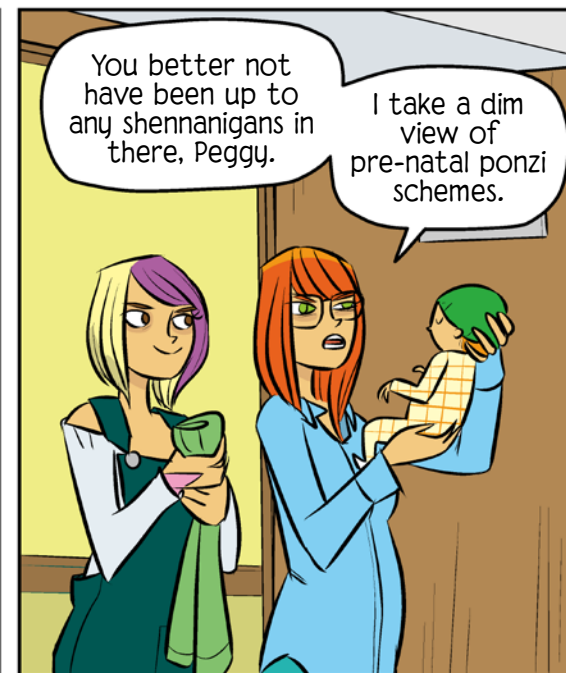
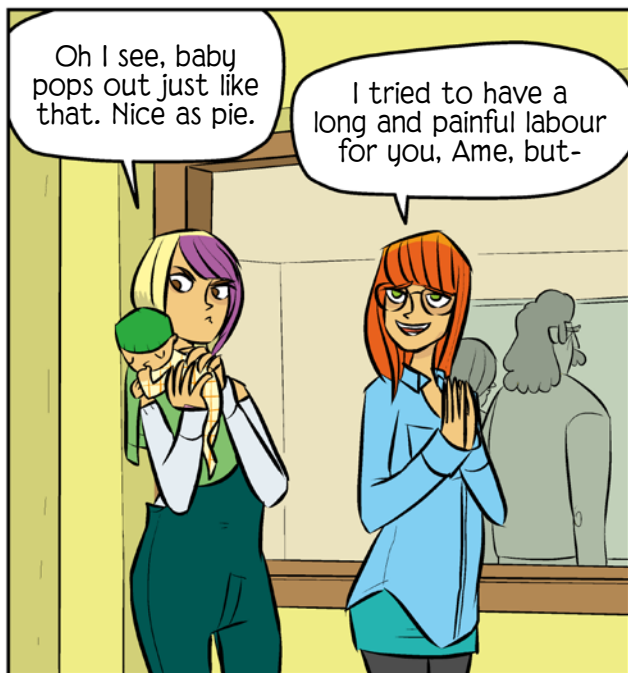


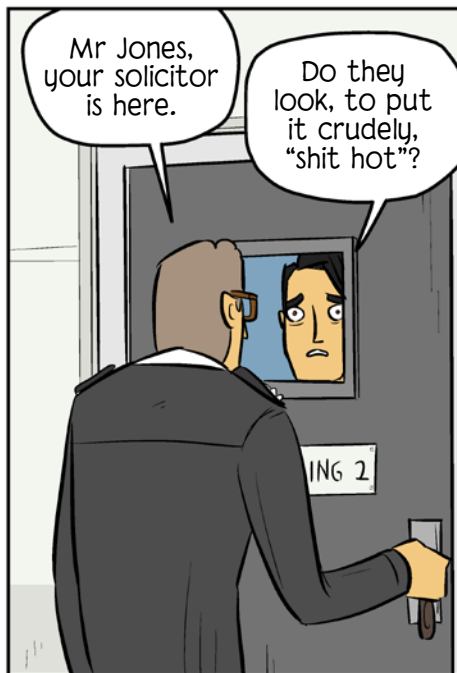
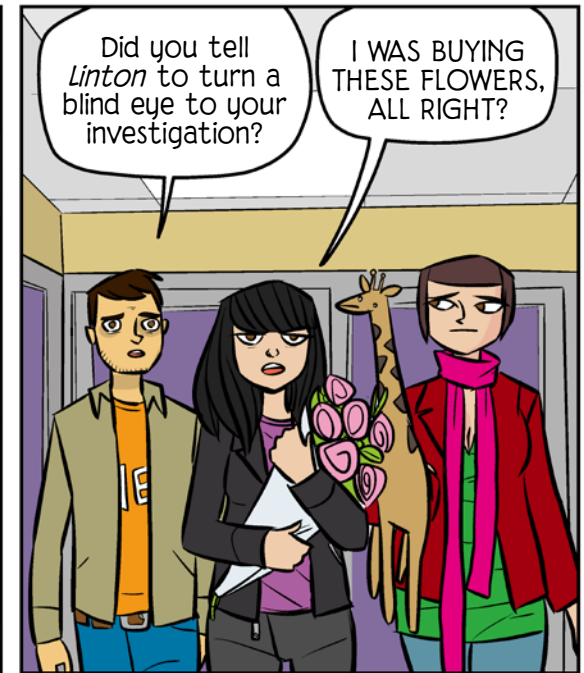


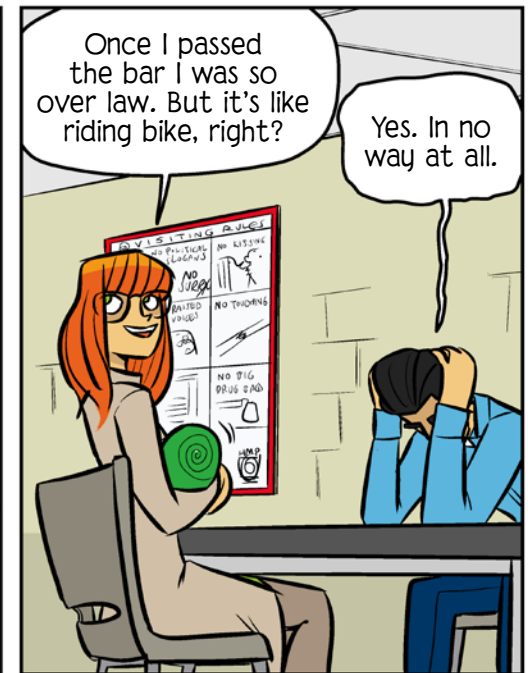
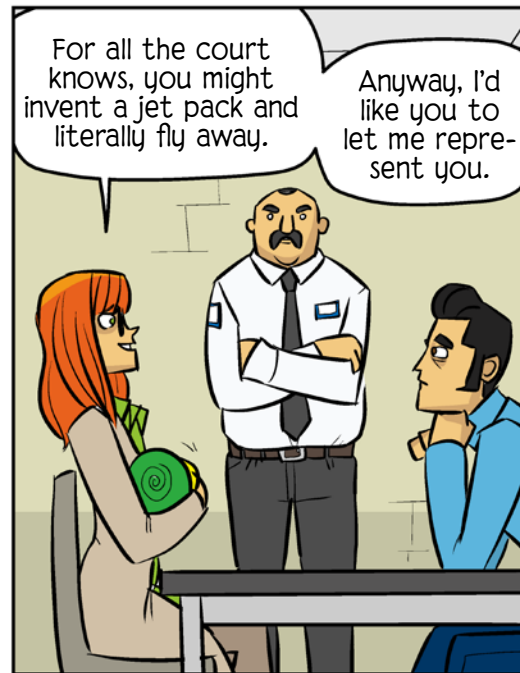


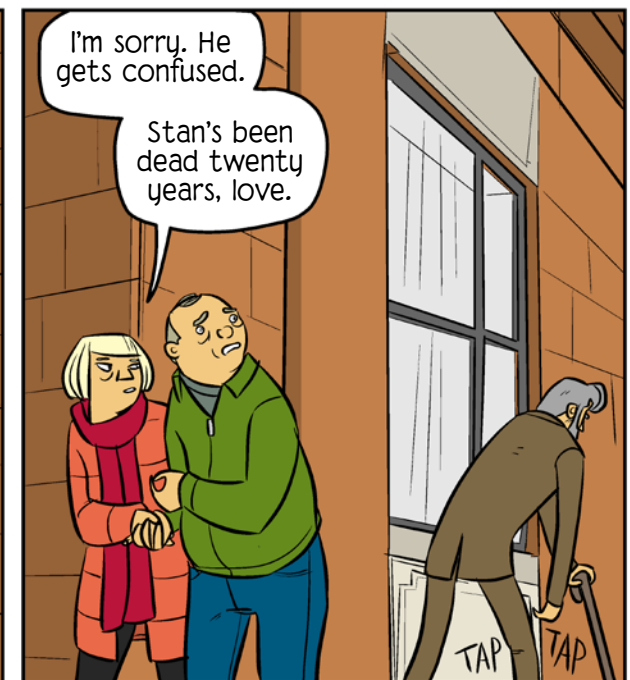
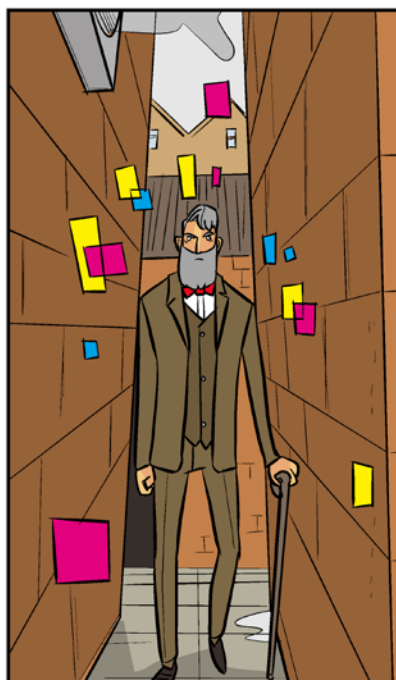
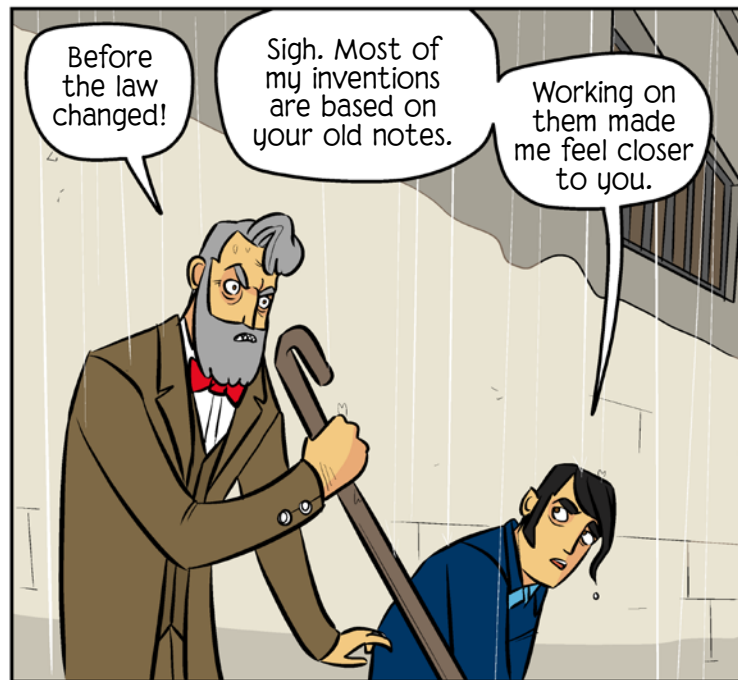




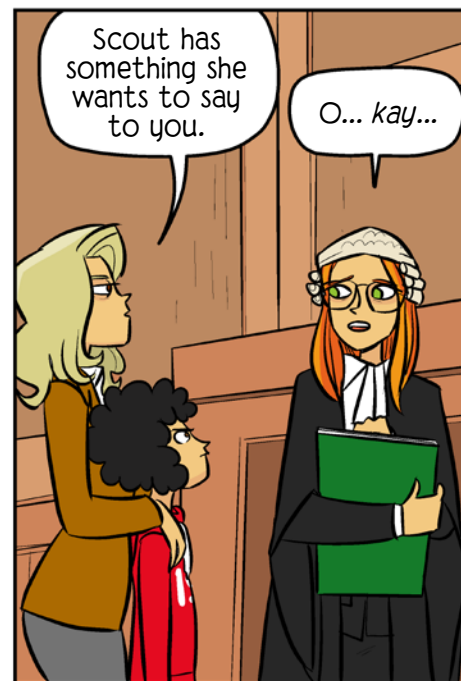
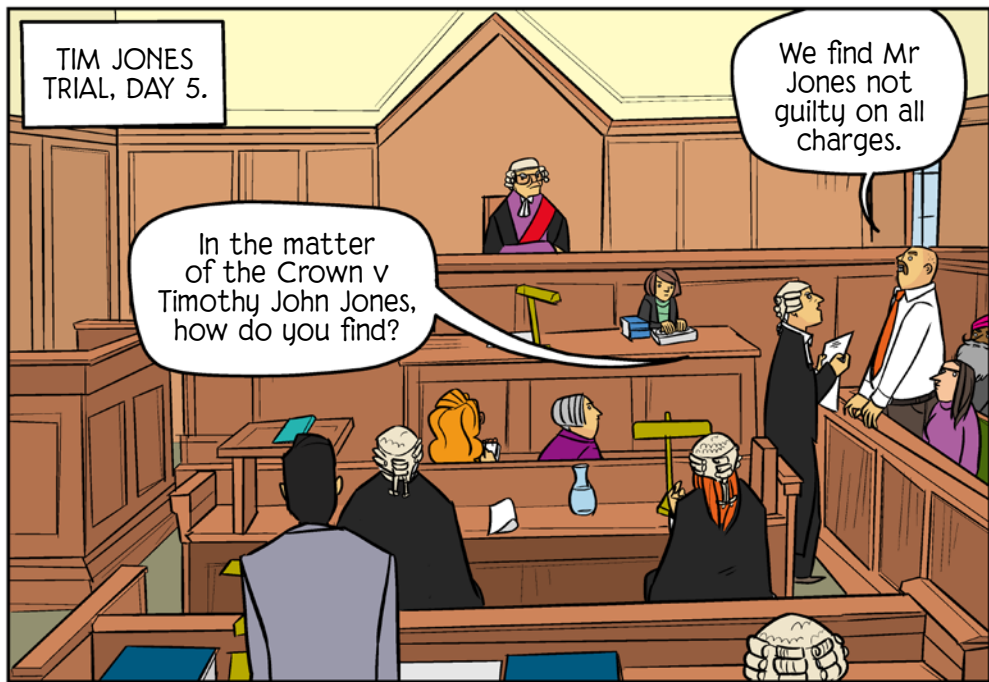


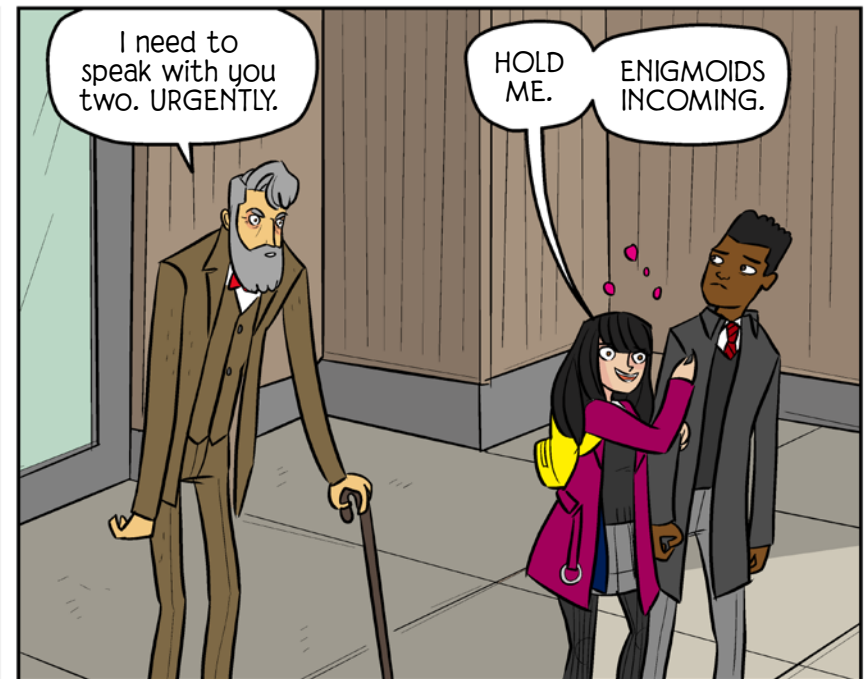
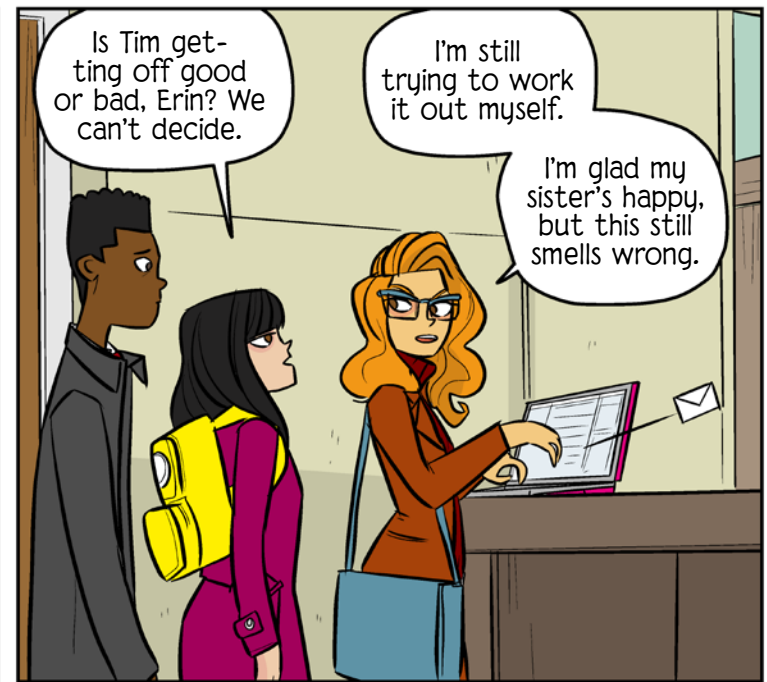
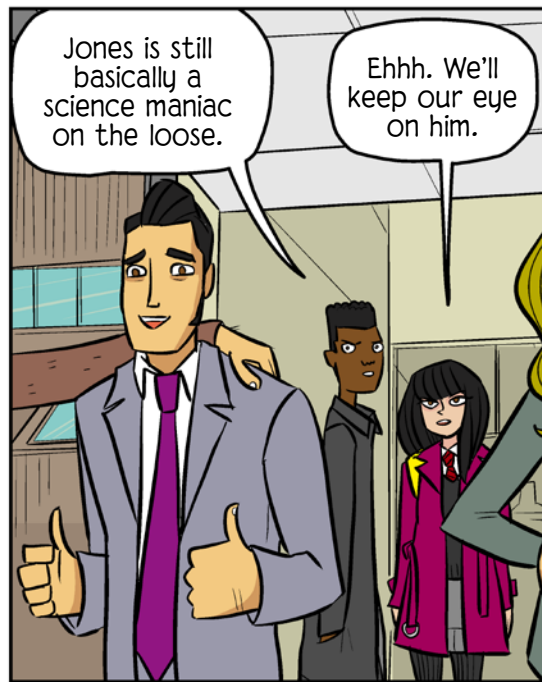
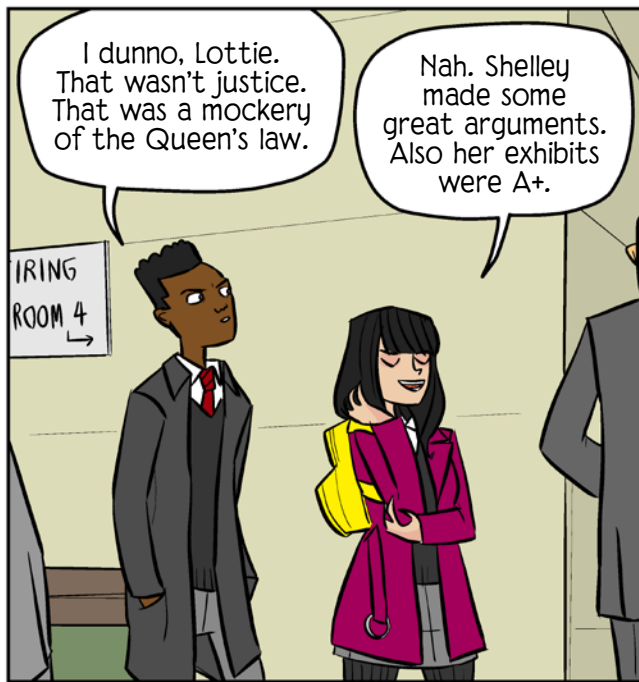


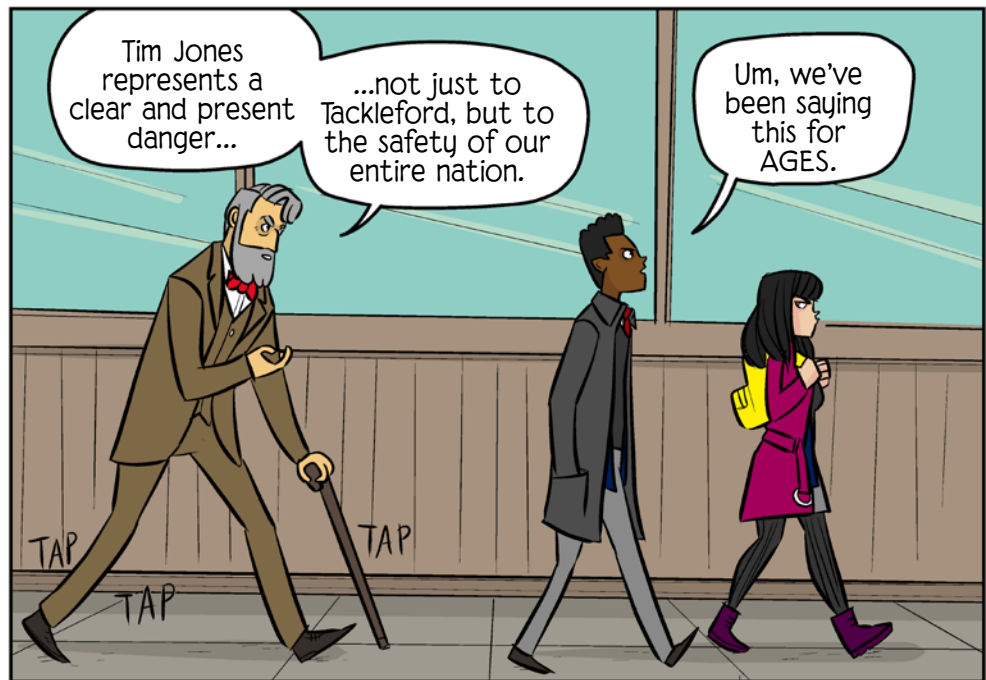


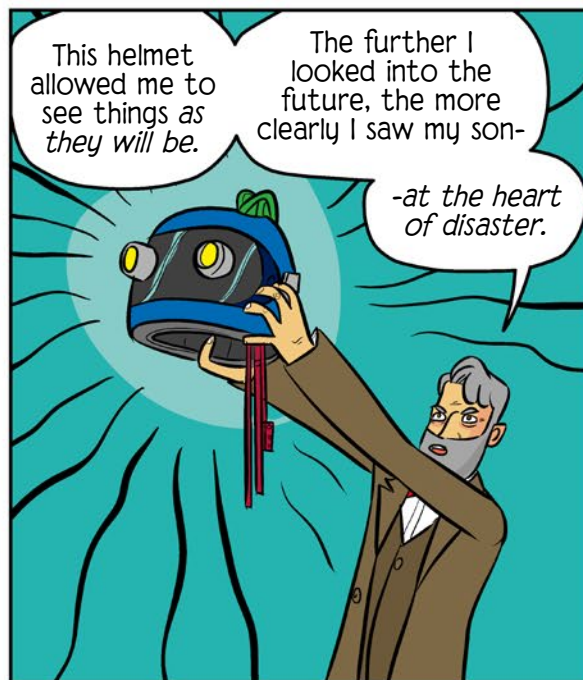


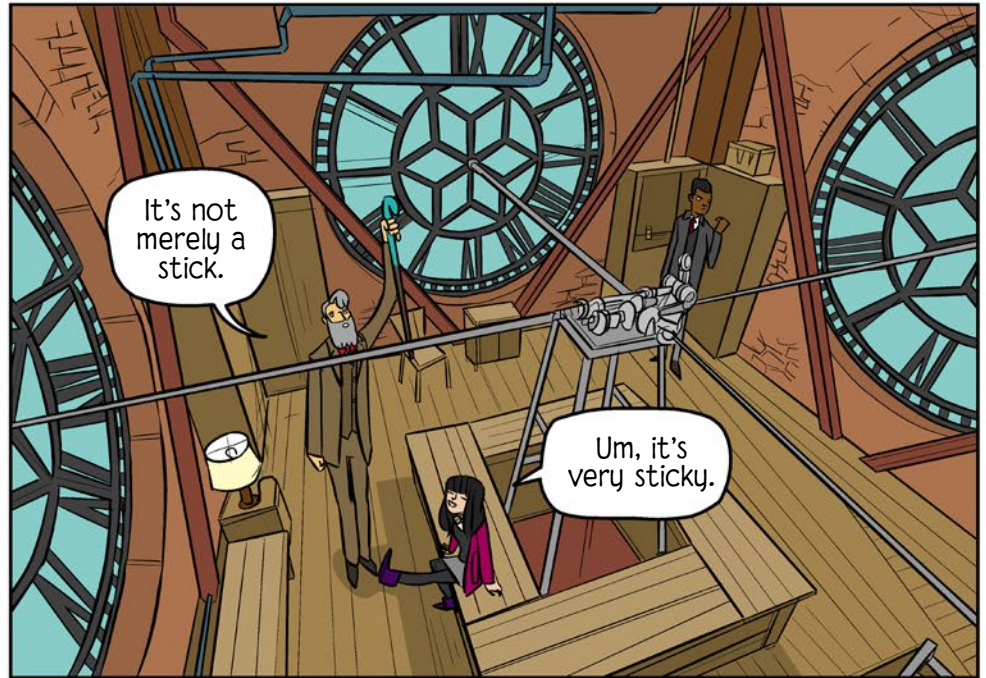
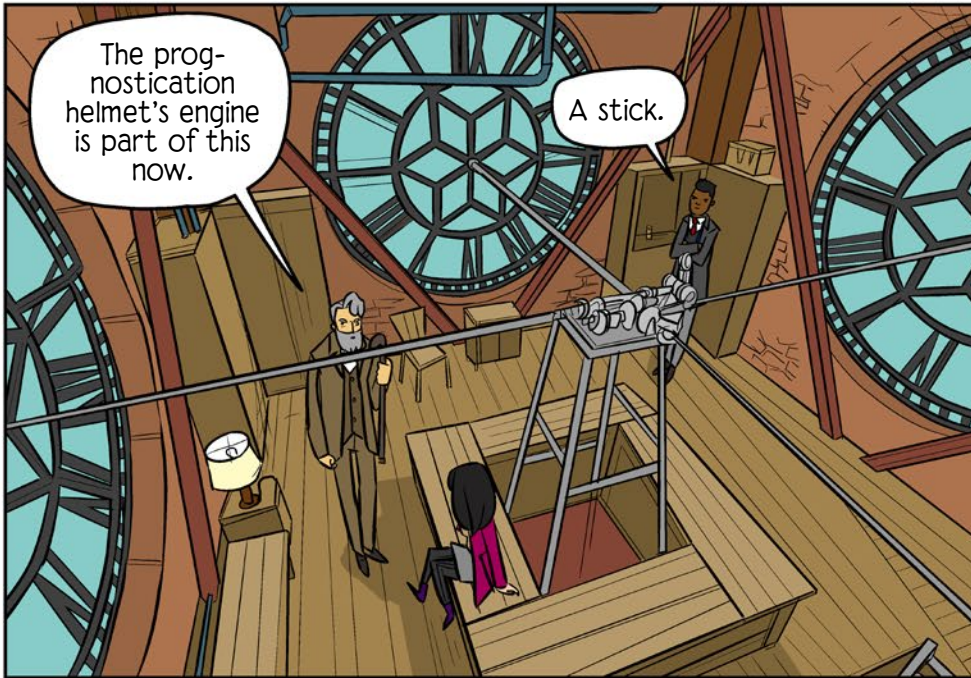
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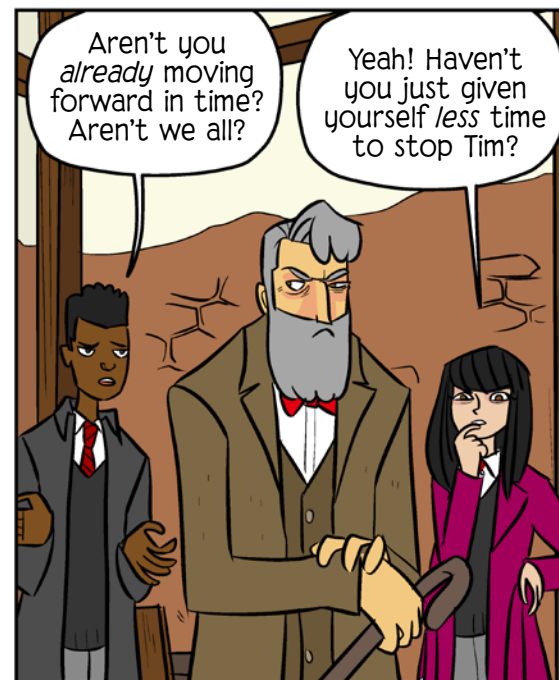
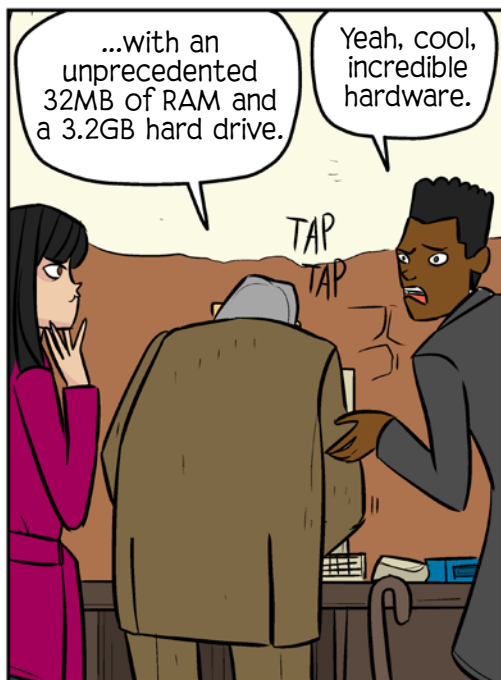
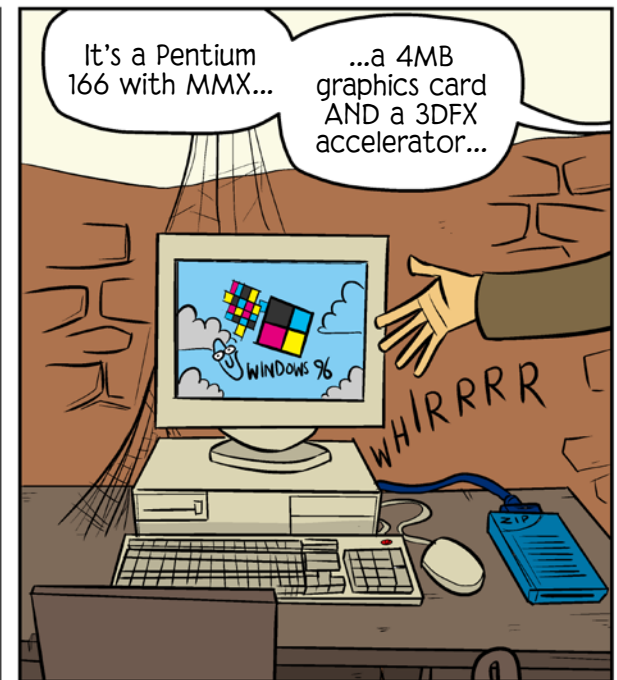
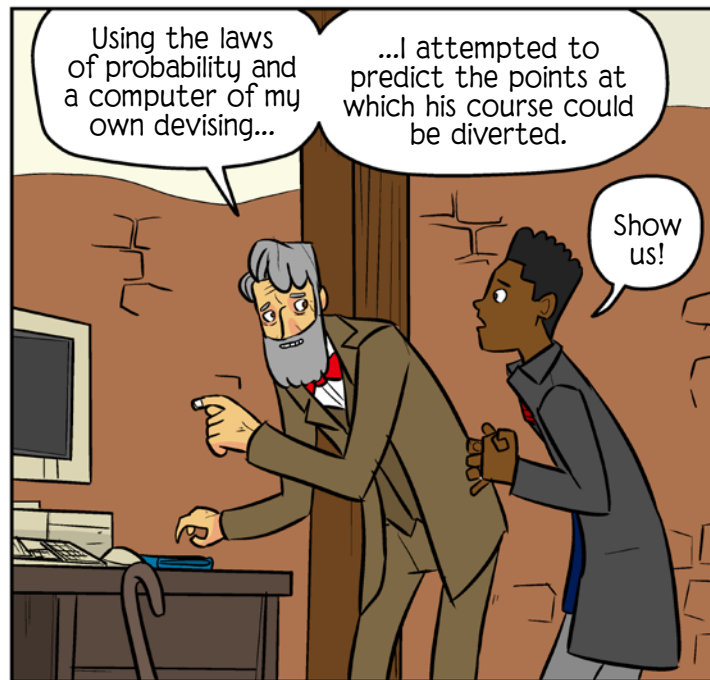


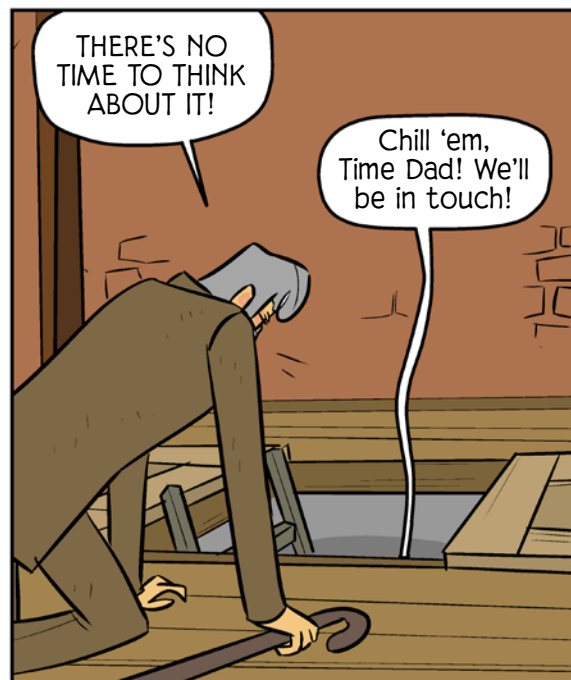
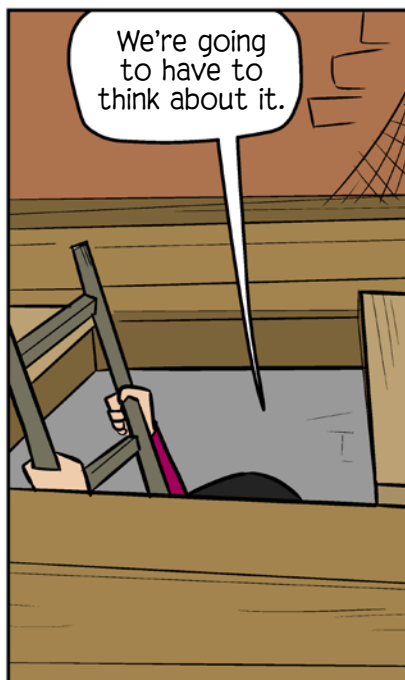
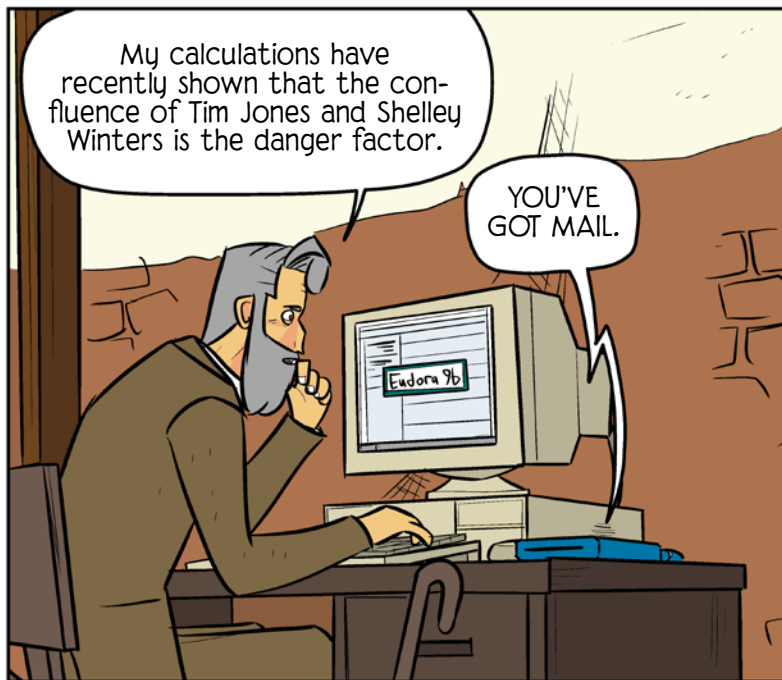


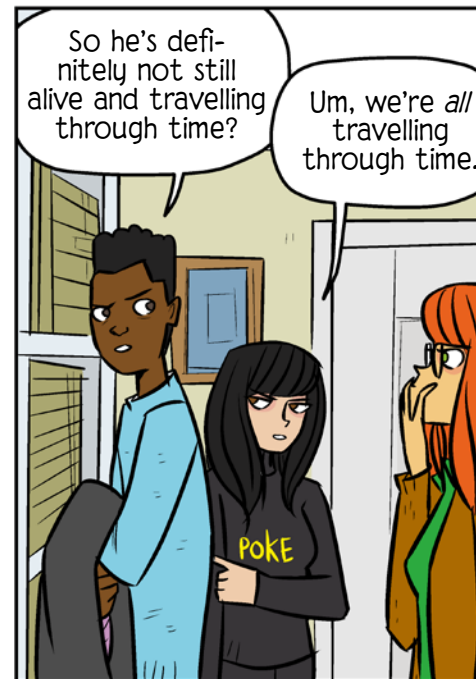
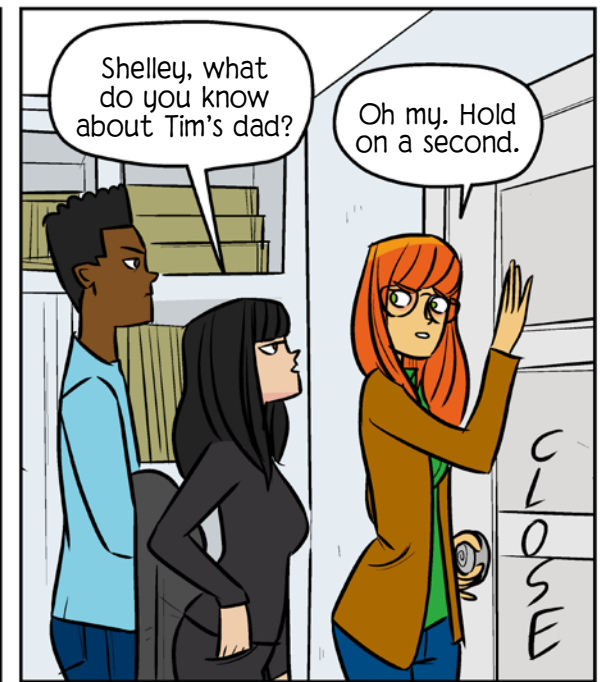
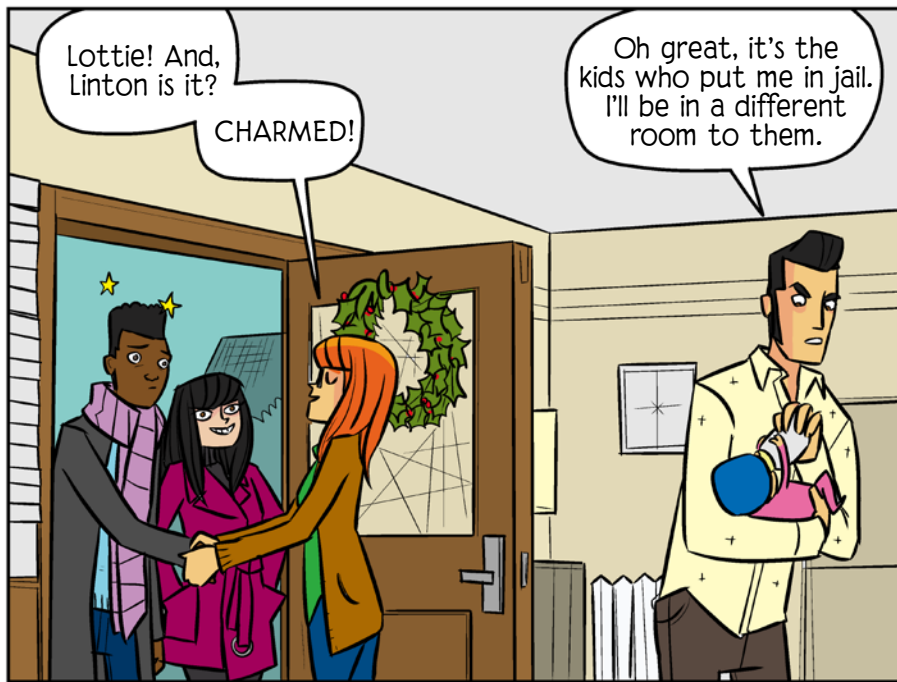


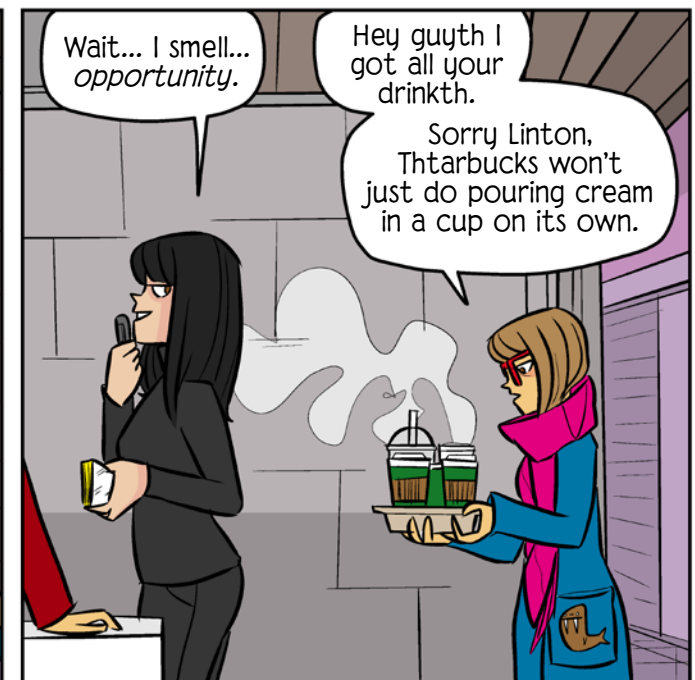
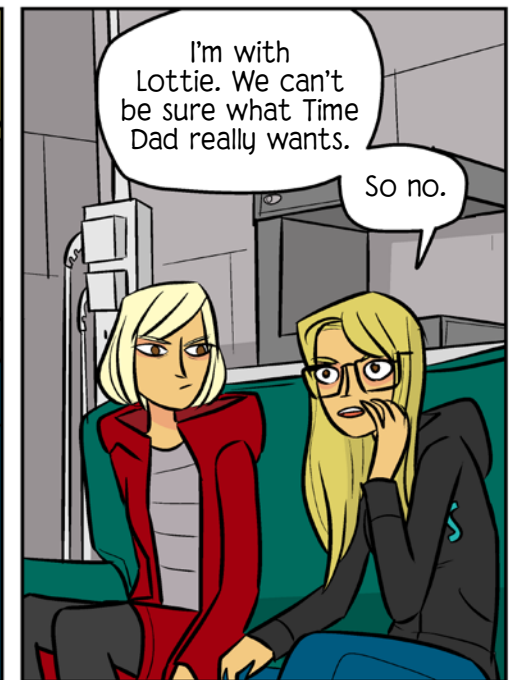
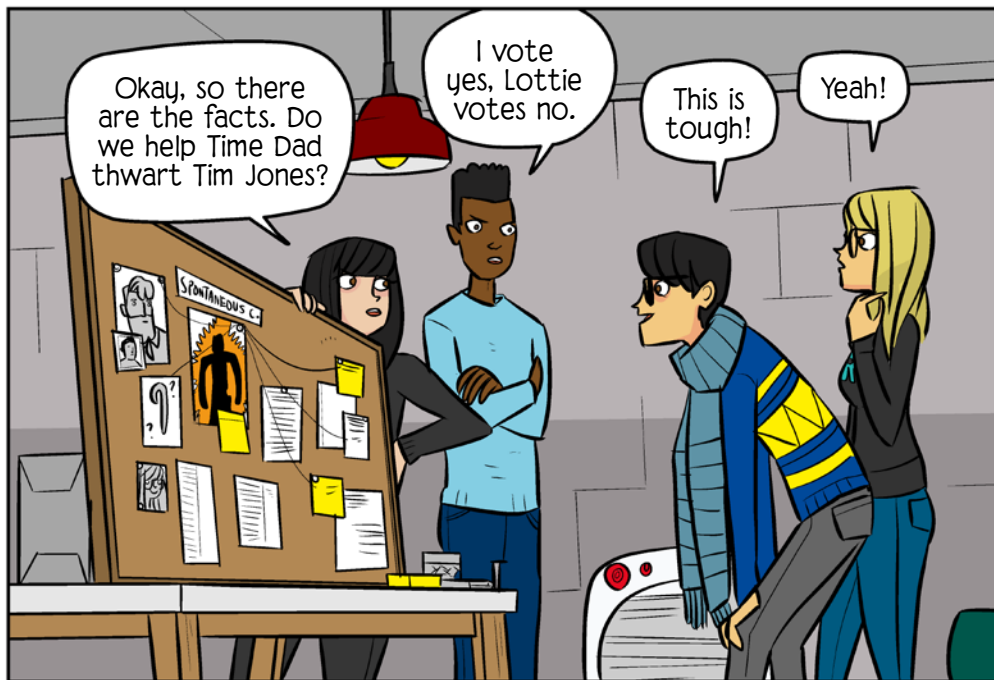


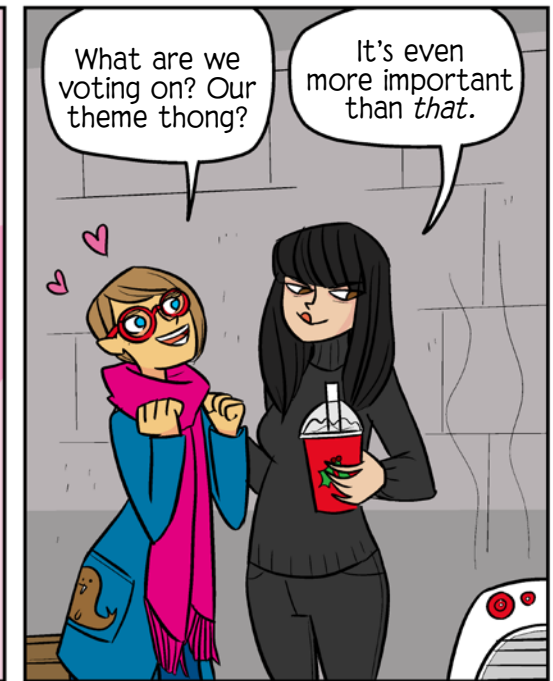
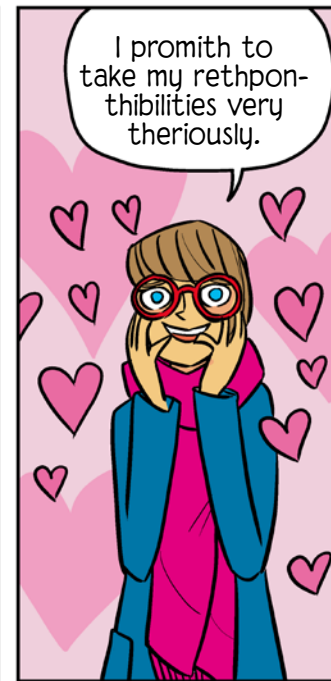
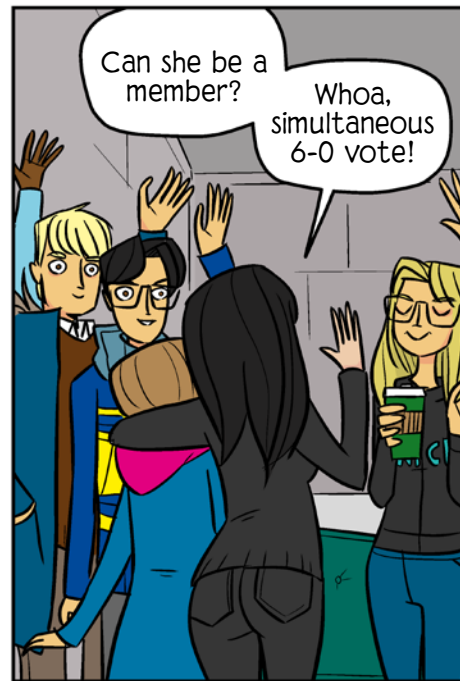
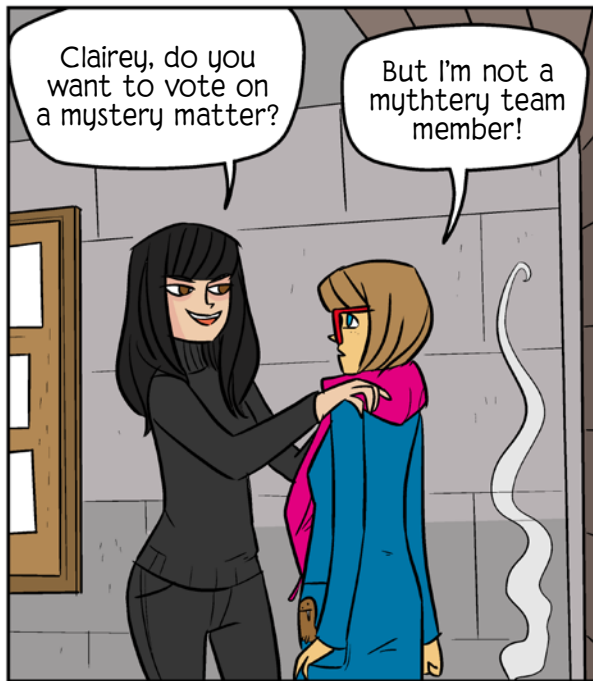


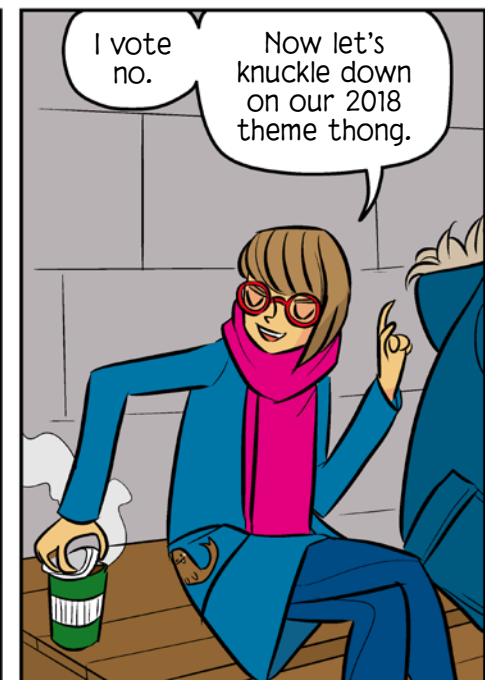
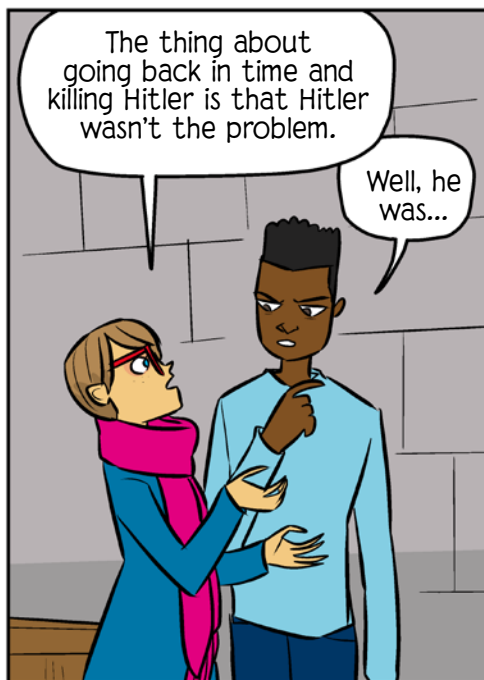
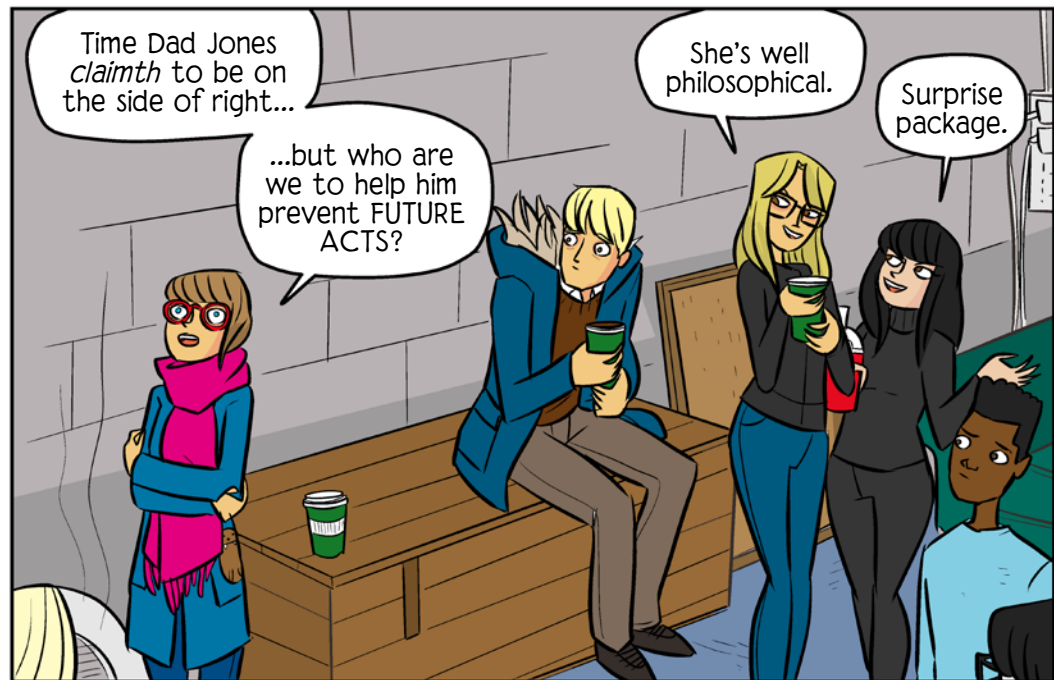


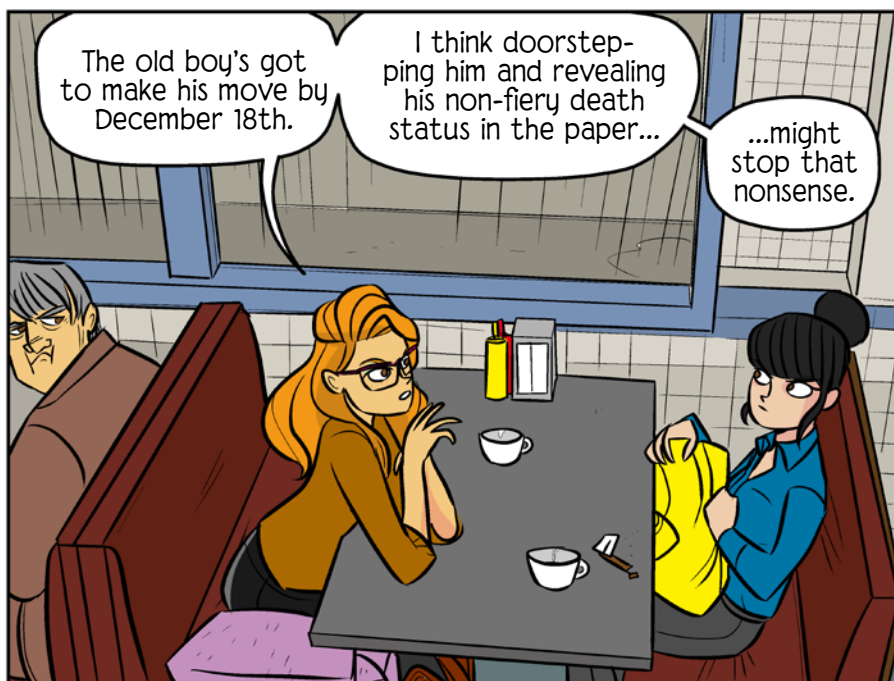


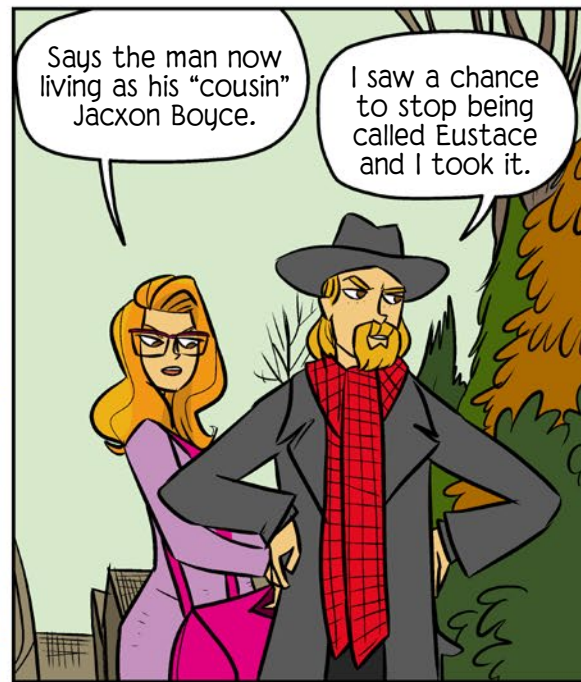
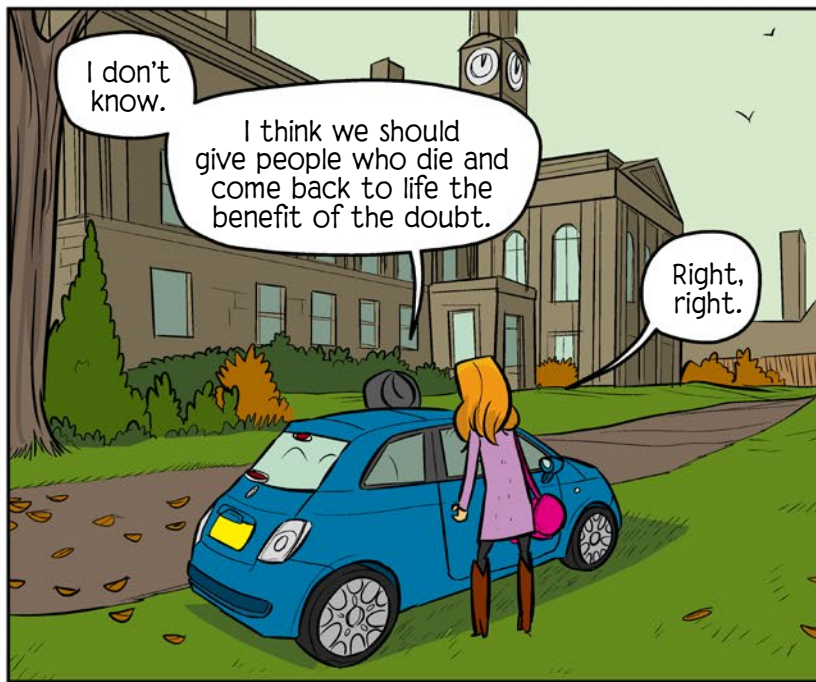


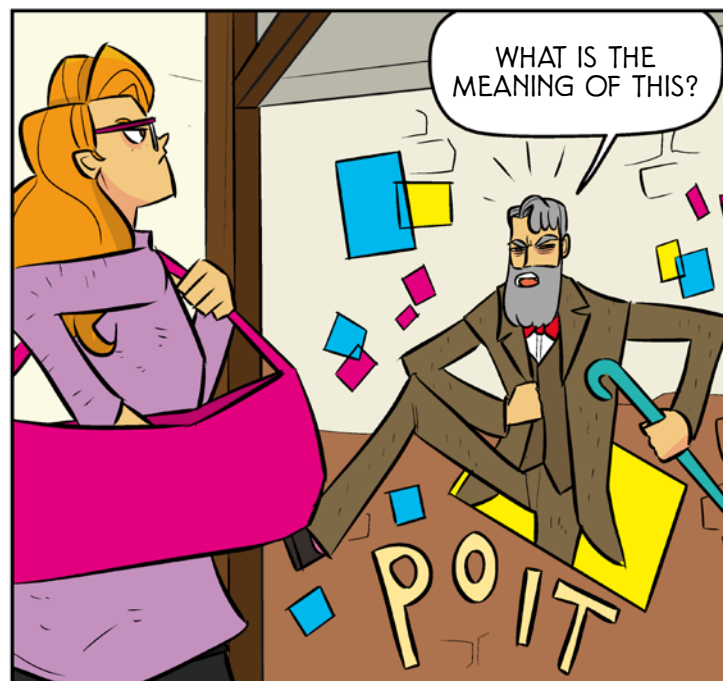
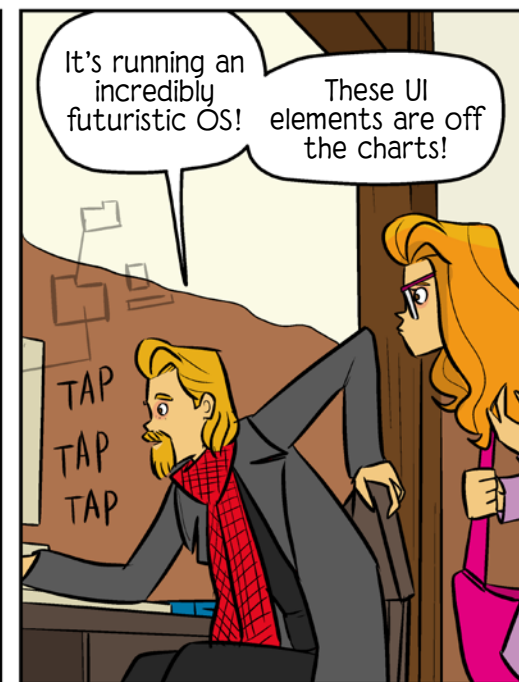
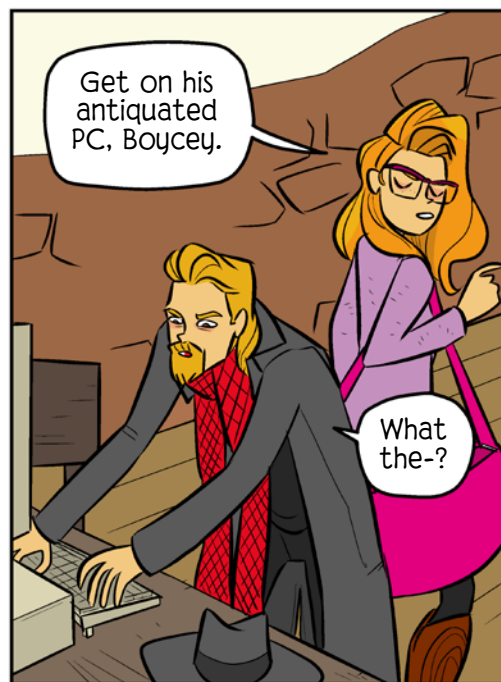


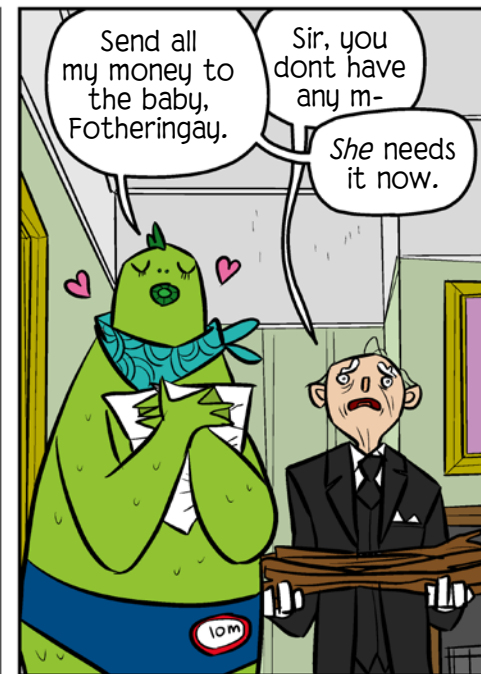


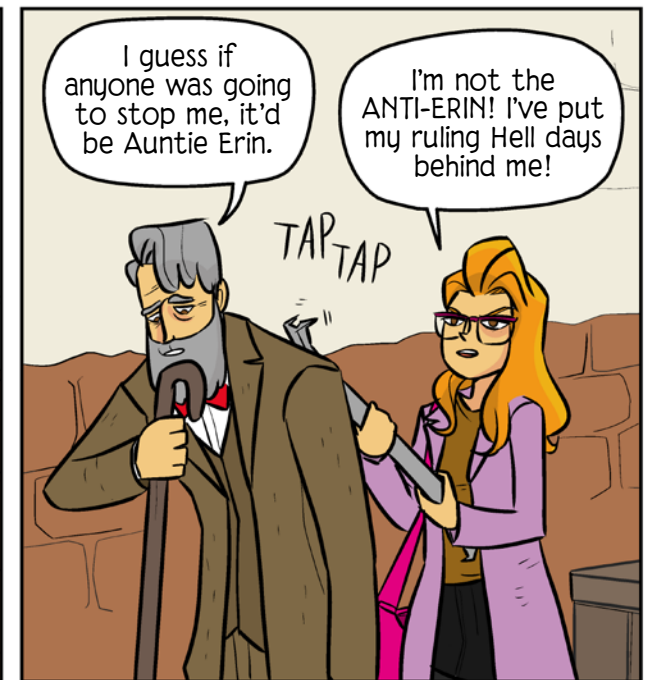
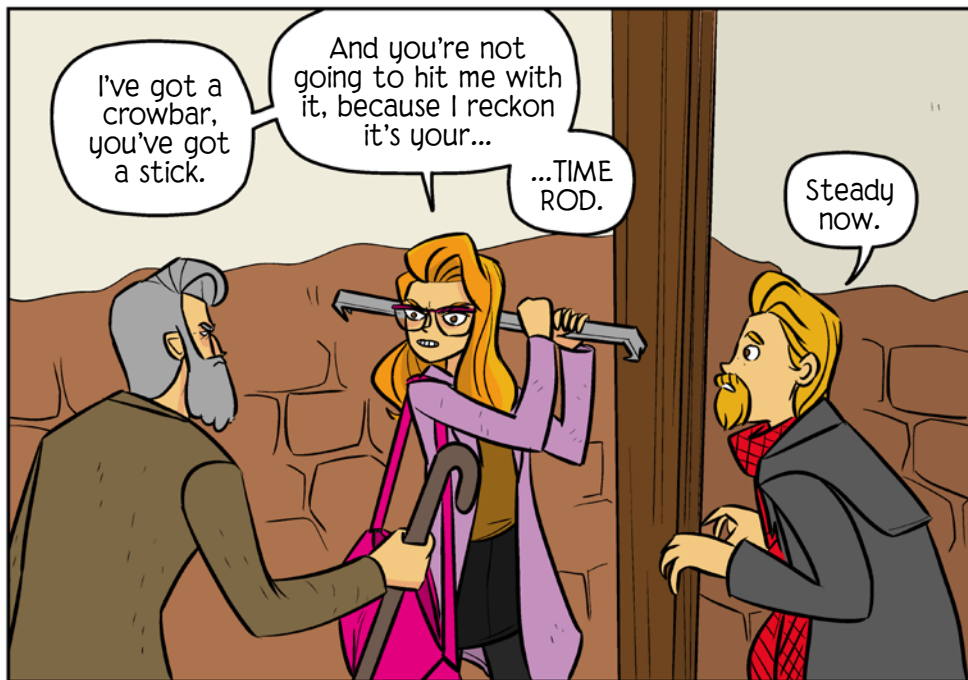


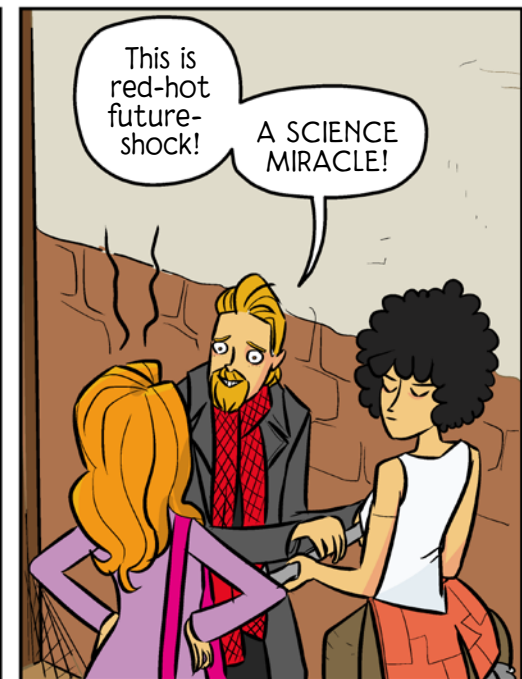


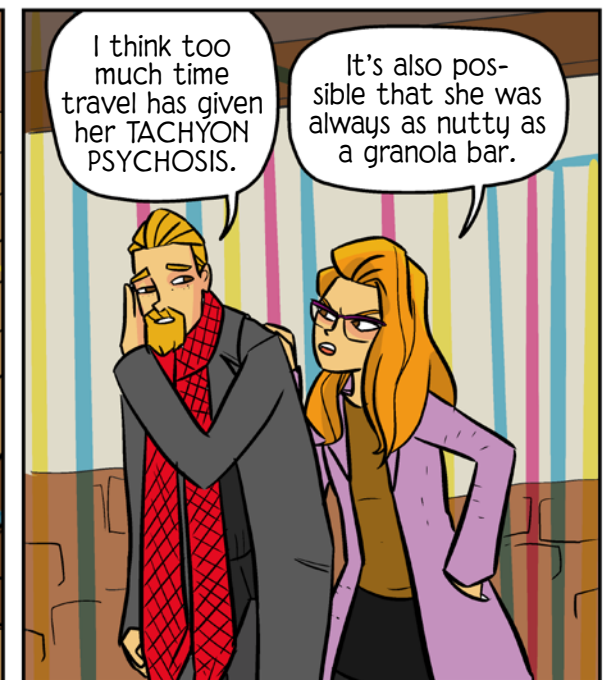
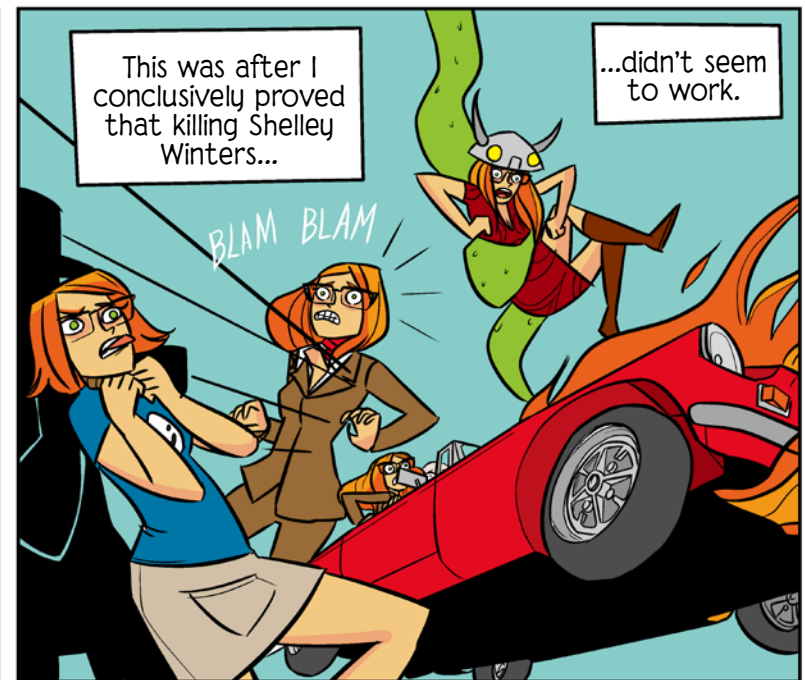
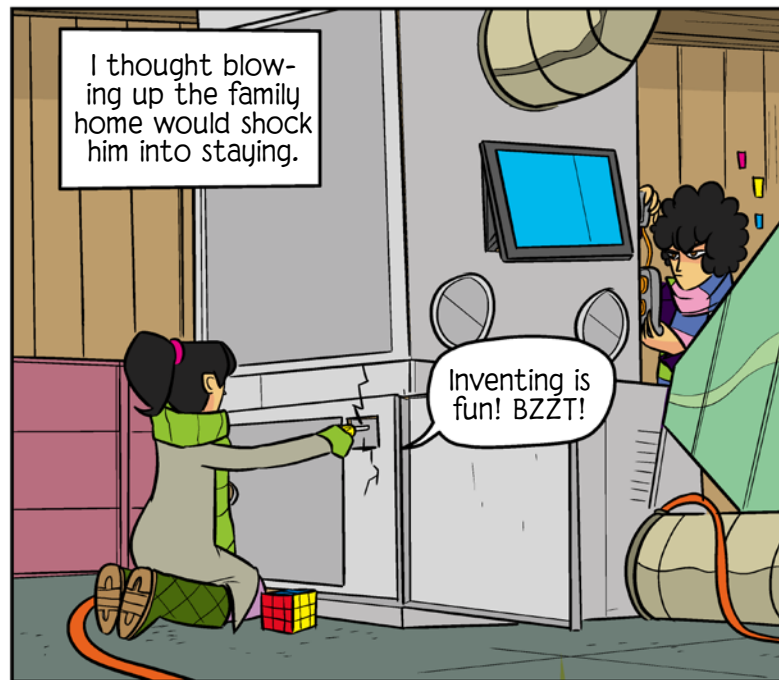


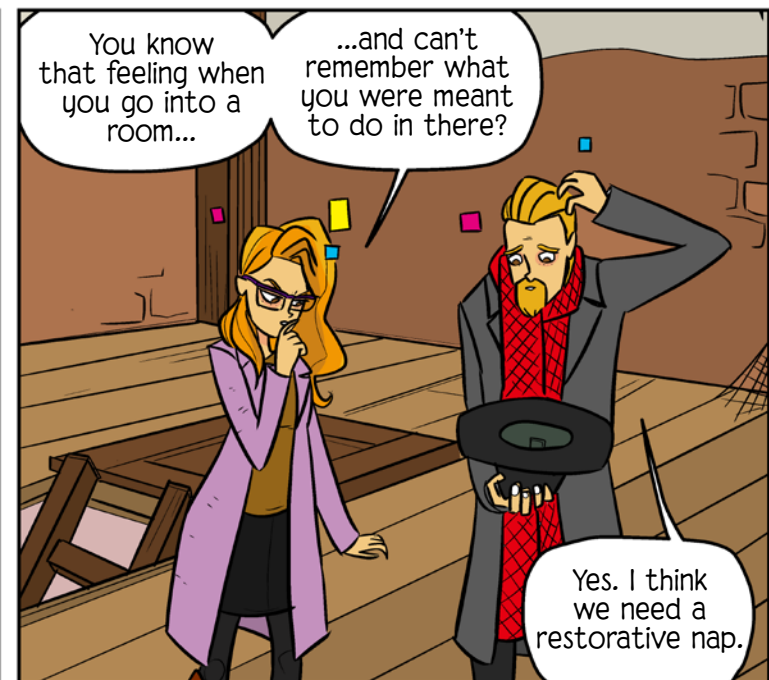
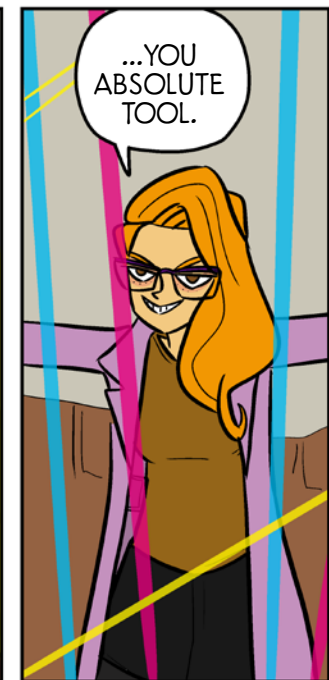
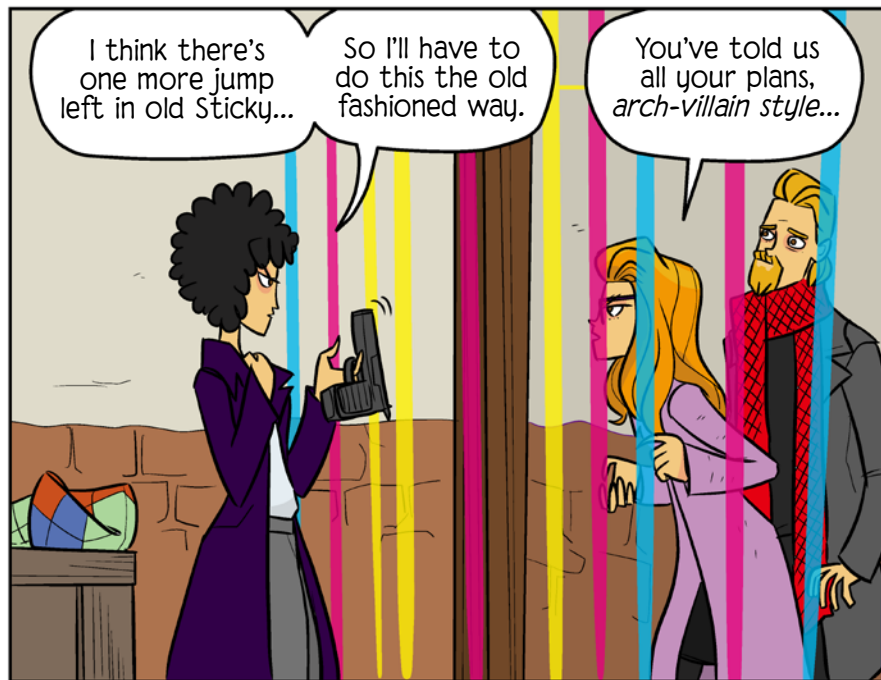






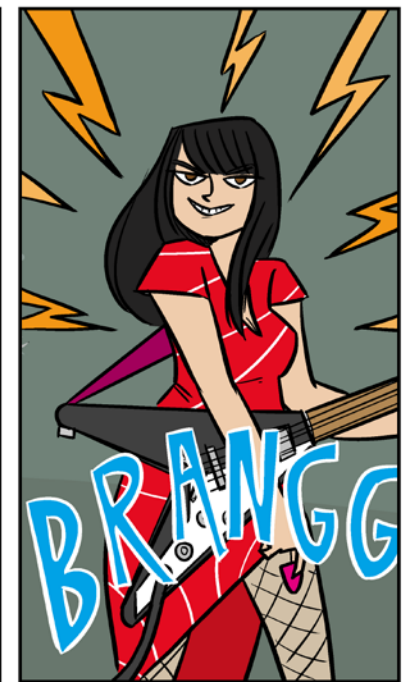
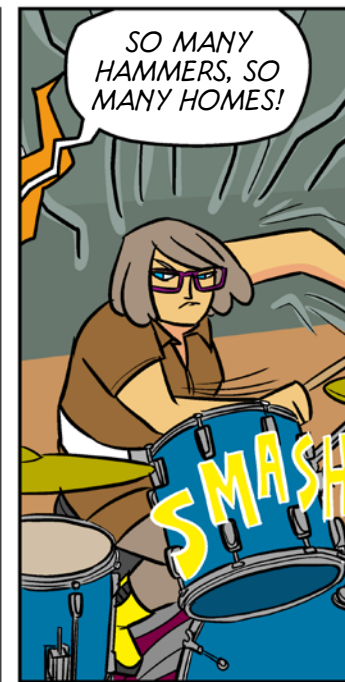
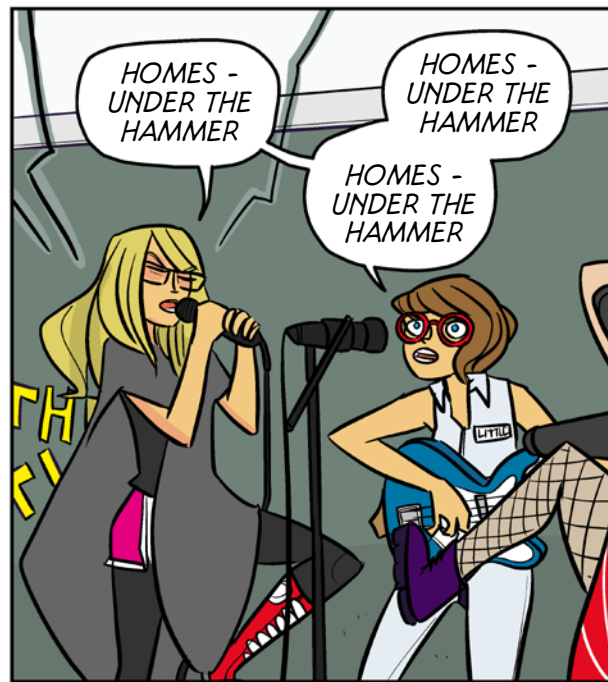
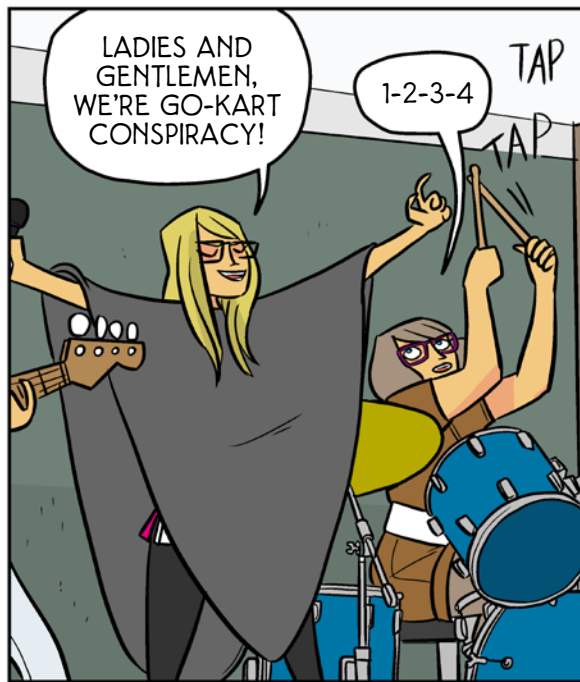


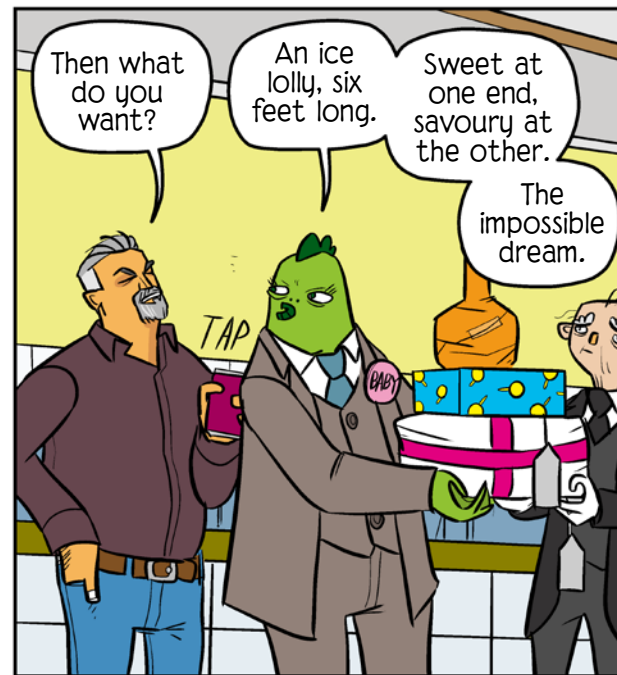


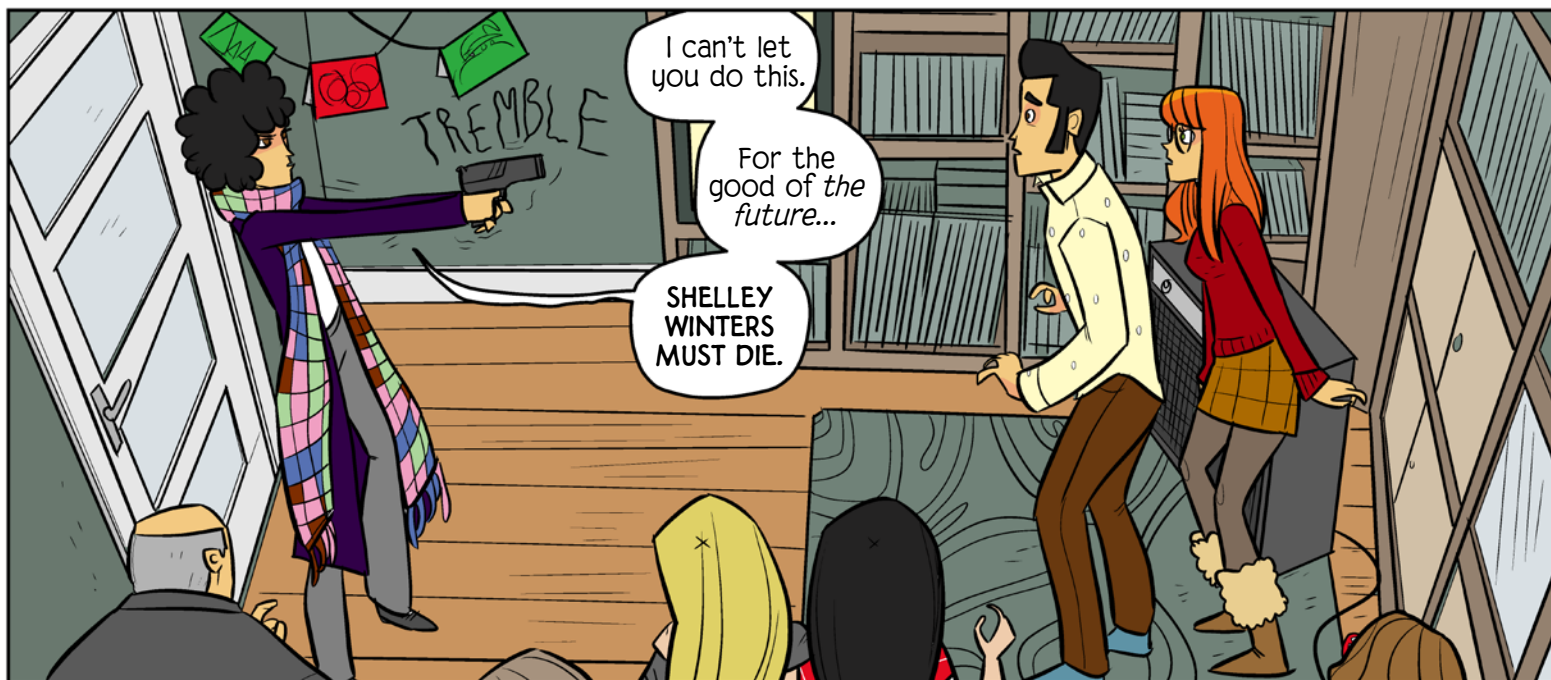
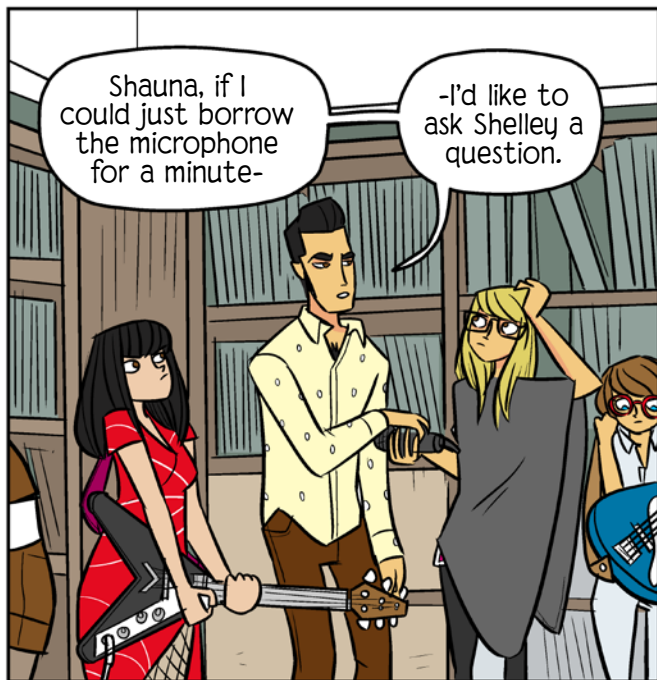


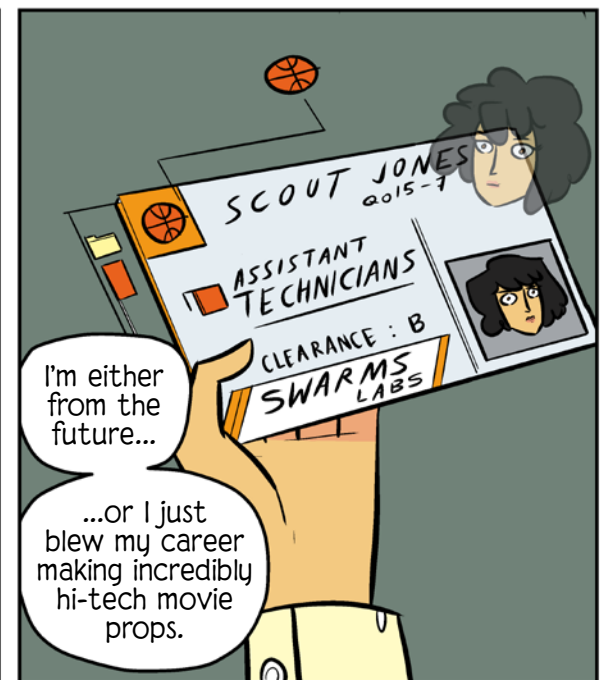
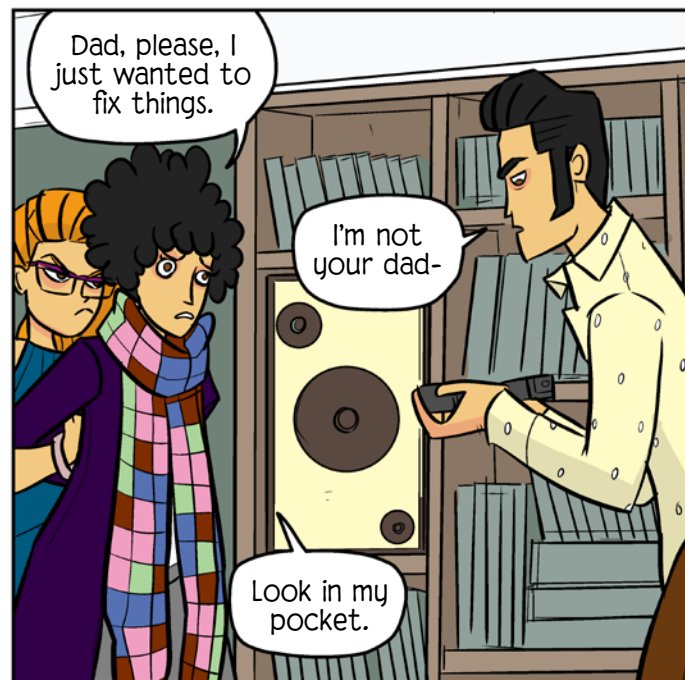


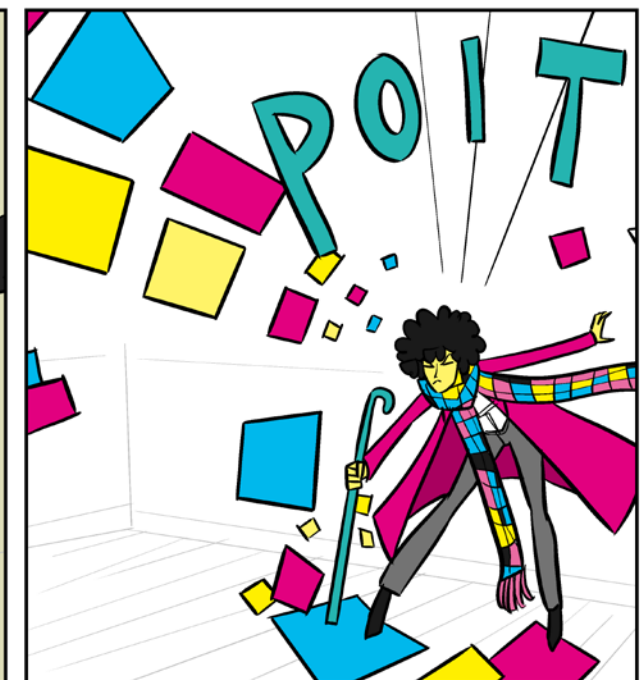
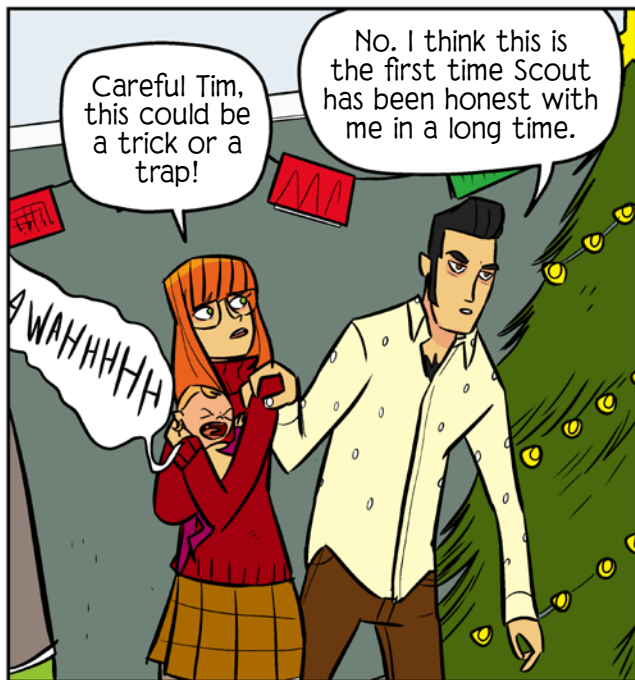


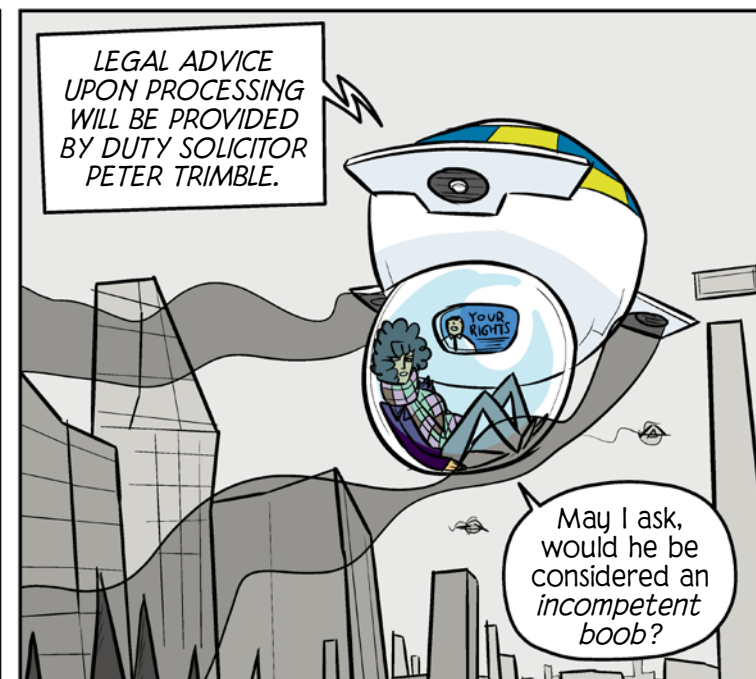
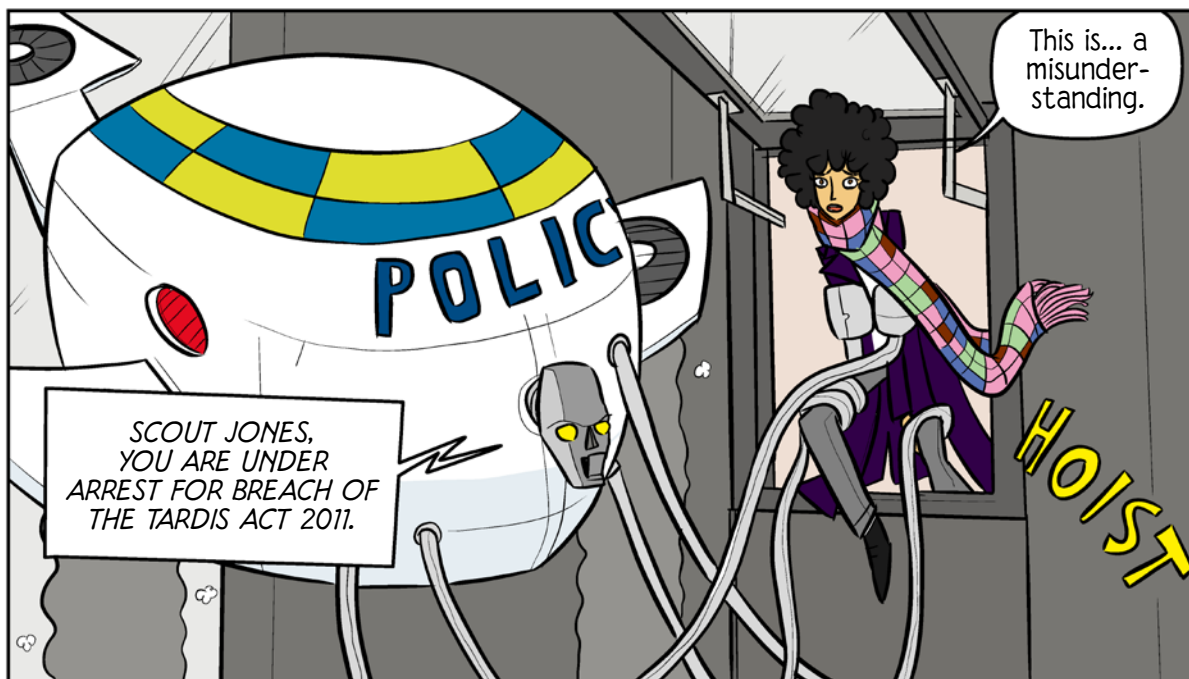


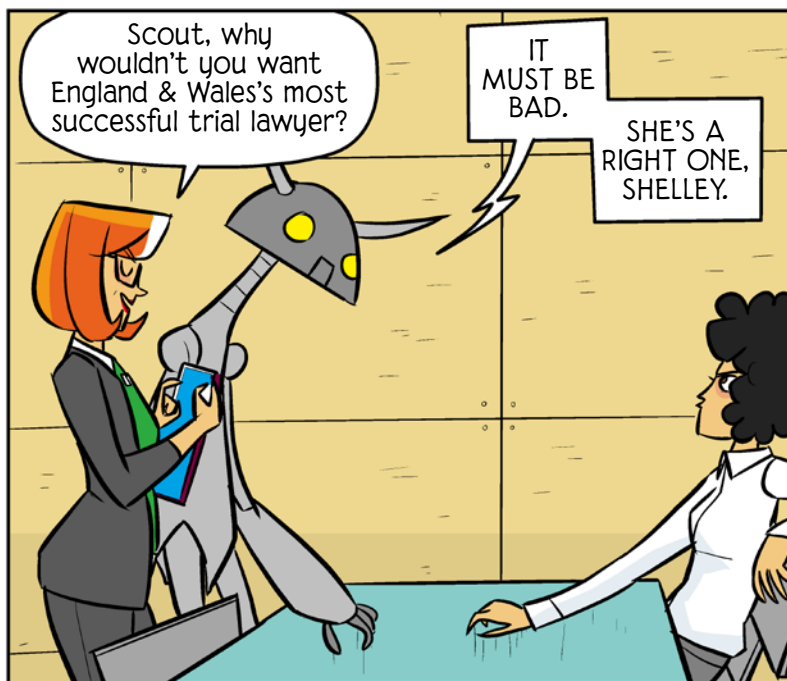




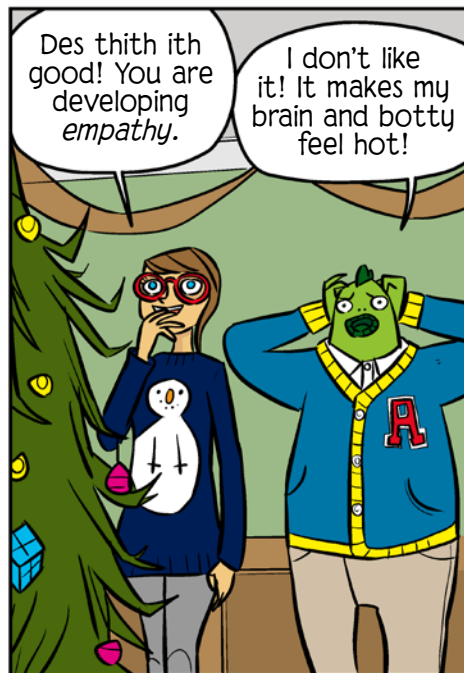
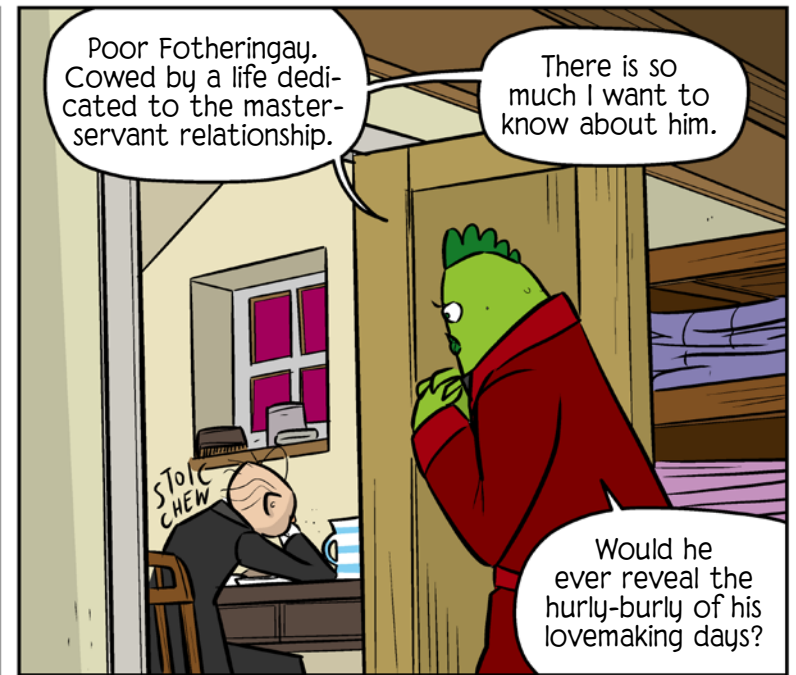


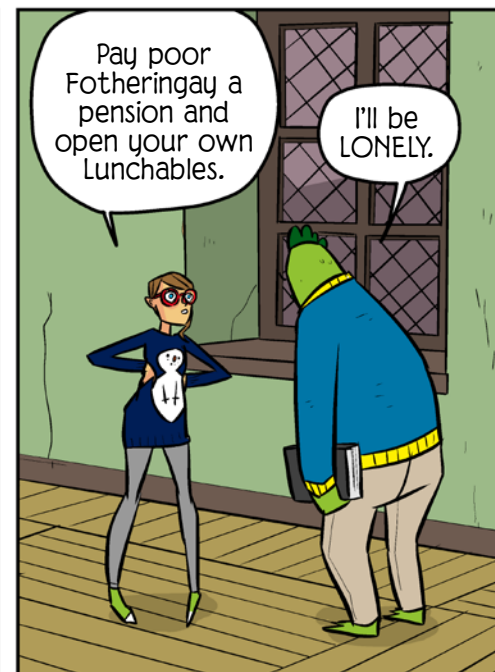
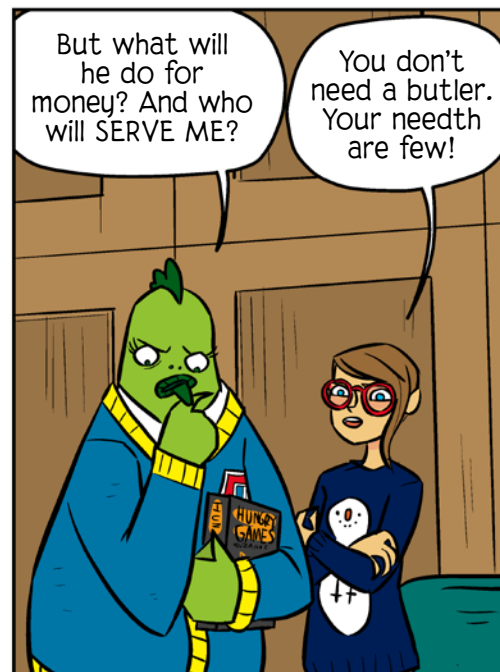
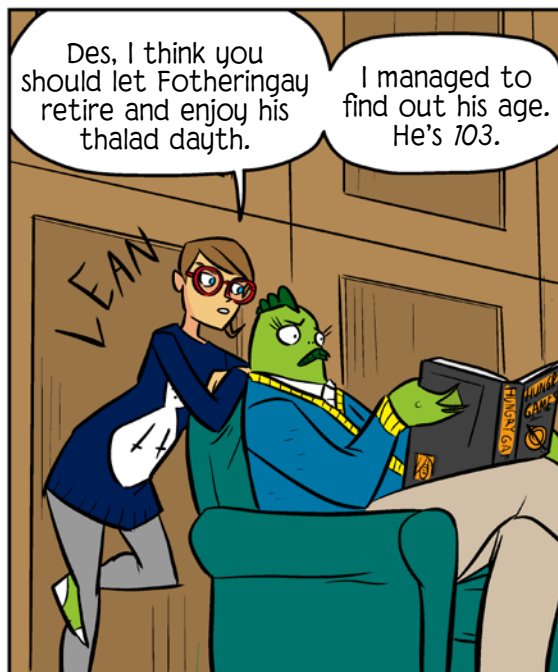






A FISHMAN'S FAREWELL







Addendum

Just to keep drawing, late in 2018 I began to make new Bobbins.horse comics - the series that revisited my earliest late-Nineties strips and made up new stories around them. After a break to work on my Dark Horse series, *Steeple*, which I write and draw, I drew some more at the end of 2019 and into 2020. There's a pleasure in revisiting those old friends, in a simpler time, but it's fleeting and I felt at the end, finally, done with all of it.

There are only a few Tackleford characters I still have something to say with. I don't know why I can still find new things for Shelley Winters to do, but I can. Writing stories for her cheers me up. Drawing her is always fun. In the four books in this series, she seems beleaguered, diminished, but towards the end of *Hard Yards*, I think I remembered who she is - the scene in the court room was what did it. You can put her anywhere and she works. She doesn't need her old stomping grounds.

I always had plans for Charlotte Grote beyond *Bad Machinery*, and I wanted her to take Little Claire with her wherever she went. Mildred Haversham had to come out of mothballs when I couldn't use Claire, and I have a whole Mildred spin-off series in the works that may, or may never, see the light of day. But it doesn't matter if it doesn't appear at this point.

Desmond Fishman will, of course, persist, forever.

But the reflex that kept sending me back to Tackleford - to the school, the university, the flats and rentals and family homes and streets I've drawn hundreds of times, has gone. The characters are quiet now. I don't hear their voices any more. They've come to a point of rest. I've drawn one more "Tackleford story" - when Charlotte is forced to go home in *Circus Windows* - when I came to draw it, the psychic territory I worked in for so long had vanished, replaced by the sort of gestalt locale that stands in for the places we recognise in dreams - familiar but bearing no relation to the actuality.

Pretty strange.

THIS SERIES:

***BOBBINS 2013/14:
A MAGICAL PINK BEING***

***BOBBINS 2014/15:
OUT OF THE WOODS***

BOBBINS: END OF THE ROAD

***BOBBINS 2017:
HARD YARDS***

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