



The Best American Comics 2009

Charles Burns (Editor) , Matt Madden (Series Editor) , Jessica Abel (Series Editor)

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Now in its fourth year, *Best American Comics* showcases the work of both established and up-and-coming contributors. Editor Charles Burns—cartoonist, illustrator, and official cover artist of the *Believer*—has culled the best stories from graphic novels, pamphlet comics, newspapers, magazines, mini-comics, and the web to create this cutting-edge collection. Featuring the work of such luminaries as Chris Ware, KAZ, and Robert Crumb, this volume is "a genuine salute to comics" (*Houston Chronicle*).

The Best American Comics 2009 Details

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From Reader Review The Best American Comics 2009 for online ebook

Tristy says

I love the eclectic mixes of these anthologies. I also love how they always reflect the editor's style and taste. I'm not the biggest fan of Charles Burns's comics, because he runs a bit too dark for me and this anthology reflects that darkness (but not as much as you would expect!). I discovered some new (to me) artists, which was really a treat. I also really loved Charles Burns's introduction, especially his ode to Tintin comics! My favorite artists/pieces in this anthology are: the collaborative comic by Robert Crumb & Aline Kominsky-Crumb and the pieces by Dan Zettwoch, Mimi Pond, Gabrielle Bell, CF, Tony Millionaire, Ted Stearn, and Jillian Mariko Tamaki.

Penelope says

Not a bad collection, but also not a great collection. I just finished this a week or so ago, and I can only remember a few strips off the top of my head...the rest were forgettable.

Glancing back through the table of contents, here are some highlights from the collection and some strips I think it could have done without:

Highlights:

"Skim" by Jillian and Mariko Tamaki (excerpt)

"The Galactic Funnels" by Dash Shaw

"Antoinette" by Koren Shadmi

Not a fan:

"Gropius" by Tim Hensley (multiple strips scattered throughout)

"Fuzz & Pluck In Splitsville" by Ted Stearn (excerpt)

"Dal Tokyo" Gary Panter

Sundry says

I've decided that the new edition in this series is my annual winter treat. I always enjoy it, and always find a couple of new graphic novelists or memoirists whose work I want to spend more time with. This year, it's Kevin Huizinga, Tony Millionaire and Jillian & Mariko Tamaki who sent me running to the library database to put titles on hold.

I didn't give this a terribly high numerical ranking because I agree less with the guest editor Mr. Burns than I have with other guest editors about what constitutes a good comic. While I love good, weird, quirky, or accomplished graphics, the best stuff has a good narrative, for me.

Charles Burns' needs are different from mine. Think I'll check out some of the stuff that the series editors Jessica Abel and Matt Madden put on their honorable mention list. What a great job, huh? Reading comics and graphic novels!

James says

A good overview of the year in comics. An update on some of my favorite writers and artists (including the long-silent Daniel Clowes with the excellent, understated "Justin M. Damiano" and Chris Ware with "Jordan W. Lint") as well as an introduction to unfamiliar ones (Adrian Tomine, Al Columbia) and a refreshing re-introduction to a couple I'd set aside (Art Spiegelman and R. Crumb). Burns' surrealist graphic novel "Black Hole" stands as one of the finest examples of a still-fledgling genre and makes him a uniquely qualified editor. There were several strips here I didn't care for, but slogging through these only makes it that much more thrilling when you discover a gem like Jason Lutes' "Berlin".

Andres says

I really like the Best American series (even the knockoffs) and I enjoyed this one a lot, even though some of the comics were out and out strange, or left you wanting more since they were just snippets of a larger whole. This is an enjoyable peek at the wide variety of comics that are out there, and certainly a great starting point in finding what suits your individual tastes. Like with other anthologies, I'll list what caught my attention the most (but without my usual one-sentence summary).

***Justin M. Damiano* by Daniel Clowes**

***Our Beloved Tape Dispenser* by Robert Crumb and Aline Kominsky-Crumb**

***Shortcomings (Excerpt)* by Adrian Tomine**

I did end up seeking out, reading, and enjoying the whole of this one.

***When I Was Eleven* by Gabrielle Bell**

***Berlin (Excerpt)* by Jason Lutes**

***Jordan W. Lint* by Chris Ware**

***Freaks* by Laura Park**

***Skim (Excerpt)* by Jillian and Mariko Tamaki**

***Antoinette* by Koren Shadmi**

***Glenn Ganges in Pulverize* by Kevin Huizenga**

***5:45 A.M.* by Al Columbia**

Chris says

I'm only two stories in so far, but Daniel Clowes' entry about an online movie reviewer was a spot on critique of juggling the self-importance of judging other peoples work with the self-awareness of how your life impacts your outlook.

UPDATE: Overall this was a great selection of comics. I feel like I've been missing out on not reading Jason Lutes' Berlin, which is gritty and violent, but strewn with intriguing characters. I also think I need to check out more of Matt Broersma. Of course I love the comics from Art Spiegelman, R. Crumb, Chris Ware, Adrian Tomine, Peter Bagge. Overall, I love collections like this. They remind of the glory days of RAW. If you want to venture outside the safe havens of superheroes, this is a great starting point for what is happening now.

Imogen says

Man, either these are all excerpts from longer comics, or Charles Burns hates comics with resolutions. About five times I had to crinkle the last page of a comic to be like, 'that's it?' Which is fine, if that's where comics are going right now, I can get with that. When it works- like in Adrian Tomine's piece here- it can totally knock you over and be awesome. And when it doesn't work, I'm usually still like 'that was nice.'

I could have done without... um, I don't remember his name, the mod guy who has I think four pieces spread out across the book. But I could have done without the comic reprinted here that ends in 'father beats up daughter and then incest, ahaha!' but otherwise this was totally awesome. I laid in Alex's bed all morning and read it while my dog flipped out because she had flea medicine all over her back.

Theresa says

I'm not a huge fan of the large comic-book universe, and I mainly picked up this book to see more of Mimi Pond's work (*Over Easy*, which is excerpted here). I found Gabrielle Bell's piece "When I Was Eleven," and I really enjoyed the story. Graphic novels or memoirs provide such a unique spatial aspect to reading, where traditional novels or memoirs are very linear. I also was interested in Jerry Moriarty's pieces, and Laura Park's "Freaks." Unfortunately, the rest of the selections were not that appealing, but for comic-book fans, this would likely be a book of interest.

Nidah (SleepDreamWrite) says

Good read.

Jon Hewelt says

Great collection! Skip the Preface!

Dave-O says

The usual mixed bag. The usual anthology players are in here, as well they should be for the most part. The intro makes the point that comics are not read on subjective reasons so that they become more matters of taste, but I don't think that its any more or less than other art forms.

With that in mind, here are my two bits:

-For all their excellent craftsmanship, Adrian Tomine and Chris Ware are treading a thin line between being interesting and being derivative.

-Ben Katchor's comic was reproduced so small that it was unreadable.

-I admire the Crumbs' ability to tell a straightforward story (that in itself, is somewhat avant-garde), including an aside on the making of the comic.

-Dan Zettwoch's has a very inventive entry in this volume.

-Dash Shaw has the only very exceptional work in the book.

Aaron says

More of what you'd expect from this series. Happy to see more CF, Sammy Harkham, and even an Al Columbia feature!

Jay says

I always enjoy the Best American Comics series, but 2009 was a bit of a disappointment. I suppose I'm just not of the same mindset as Charles Burns, the series editor. He seems to go for more dark, male-oriented, "dumb" jokes type of comics. There are some good choices that I enjoyed, such as Skim by Jillian and Mariko Tamaki, Freaks by Laura Park, and the comics by Dash Shaw and Ben Katchor. The rest, however, seemed fairly mundane and didn't grab me on an intellectual level. But, I think the point of the series is to highlight a variety of comics. You will gravitate towards some and quickly forget others. I wish I liked a few more in this series, but it was a fun read nonetheless.

Robert says

Pretty much everything in here is well-done, but somehow this Charles Burns guest-edited edition, along with the Harvey Pekar-edited volume from 2006, remains for me the weakest of the series I've read thus far (with just the brand new 2010 tome left to bring me up to date). The book lacks the cohesion that Chris Ware and Lynda Barry brought to the 2007 and 2008 collections, respectively. I can see the merit in all the stories here, but little truly inspired or excited me; somehow it all remained just a mostly pleasant reading

experience. As per the preface by series editors Jessica Abel and Matt Madden, comics, like all art forms, are a hugely subjective experience, so everyone will have their personal huzzahs and brickbats on the selections and the artists chosen. Some of mine, starting with the huzzahs:

Laura Park's art ("Freaks") is really beautiful in this story. She's a breakout new star in the alt-comics world for good reason.

Based on the excerpt included here, I would like to read the complete graphic novel *Skim* by the Tamaki sisters. Lovely.

It's always a pleasure to read Kaz's "Underworld" comic strips.

Jerry Moriarty's recent return to print is very welcome: truly the Edward Hopper of cartoonists.

Al Columbia's piece is macabre & gorgeous.

Dash Shaw's "The Galactic Funnels" is very interesting and innovative (Dash Shaw is pretty much always interesting and innovative). I read it 3x.

Michael Kupperman is just flat-out funny.

Jason Lutes: just pure respect for his BERLIN. Magnum Opus, in spades.

Negatory:

Even though I understand that he's very talented, I've never gotten the big love for Adrian Tomine: always found his art uninteresting and I'm sorry but derivative (of Daniel Clowes) and his writing one-note, and the fact that this piece from his graphic novel *Shortcomings* mines the wearisome I'm-a-Twentysomething-Asshole-Het-Guy trope (reminiscent of Joe Matt) doesn't change my lack of regard for his work one iota. So sorry, sue me.

Ron Rege's adaptation of a chapter of Lynda Barry's *Cruddy* illuminates nothing of Barry's brilliant text.

I love Ted Stearn's *Fuzz and Pluck*, but don't think this excerpt works so great. Some stuff just excerpts better than others - he's a wonderful cartoonist's cartoonist, irregardless.

Peter Bagge and Doug Allen's stories, respectively: Meh. Really, these were among the BEST comics of the year? I figure they are included as pals of Burns's and per their past individual bodies of work, and that's okay, but both guys have done much, much better than these trifles.

Onward. Looking forward to the 2010 edition, edited by Neil Gaiman, in which he selected a story by Steve MacIsaac & Todd Brower, "Ex-Communication," which originally appeared in the anthology I edited, *The Book of Boy Trouble Volume 2* (Green Candy Press). That selection alone is gratifying, for obvious reasons.

Courtney says

A vast majority of this collection is sub-par. Perhaps, it is because it is framed as "best" that I feel that they fall short. I was appreciative of the variety of styles, but I found many of the comics lacking actual substance.

However, I do recommend that you pick up this volume and read Laura Park's (in my copy it's page 217), as well as Jillian and Mariko Tamaki's section. I found both comics to be wonderfully (and differently) styled, and their subject matters to be compelling. Koren Shadmi's *Antoinette* was funny, and Kevin Huizenga's *Glenn Ganges* that followed was also very good. But after that, it's all down hill again.

The section that I thoroughly enjoyed didn't even last for 100 pages. I was hopeful because I had greatly enjoyed *The Best American Comics 2010*. Although, I was mostly drawn to that one dues to Neil Gaiman's name.
