



Julius Knipl, Real Estate Photographer

Ben Katchor , Michael Chabon (Introduction)

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Julius Knipl, the rumbled antihero of Ben Katchor's cult cartoon strip, comes alive in this all-new collection of strange and strangely absorbing urban adventures. The Knipl stories collected here resurrect a lost metropolis and its residents, summoning up half-forgotten yesterdays and celebrating the surreal substrate of the quotidien.

Julius Knipl, Real Estate Photographer Details

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From Reader Review Julius Knipl, Real Estate Photographer for online ebook

Elaine says

This graphic novel is not one where there is a connection between individual stories or elements. Rather, a man walks down a strange street full of strange buildings and people, and from time to time we are let in on what he is seeing.

I like graphic novels and appreciate the work that it takes to create complex stories with pen and ink, and a sprinkling of words. Therefore, I had hope for this GN, but overall, I need more connections between characters and events. This ended up feeling a little bit as if someone gathered up a whole series of old time Sunday Funnies and put them together in a book. In a world of binge watching we have all been trained, for good or bad, to need more continuity.

The drawings are well done, and the creative mind that came up with all of the odd museums and places is definitely quirky and fully of vision. I ended up skimming many sections however.

Peter says

In this graphic novel, Katchor brilliantly creates an alternate-universe New York City, delicately straddling the line between used-to-be and never-was. Knipl isn't the protagonist as much as a leitmotif, weaving in and out of these narratives in his nocturnal sojourns, not appearing on every page but never more than a block or two away. Odd, yet amiable.

Miles says

So unusual and original. These stories are entertaining and reflect a strange kind of nostalgia that Katchor has for the imagined ephemera of urban living circa 1950 or so. I enjoyed these vignettes, but I found that I liked them most when I read them sporadically, rather than in an extended session.

Will says

Ben Katchor is a great artist in sequential art. His art has a rough, but detailed vintage feel that compliments his wordy evocation of a nearly alternate universe.

It's New York of course, but it's the Big Apple of an alternate universe. It's a universe where the minute trivia of pedestrian lives is elevated to an epic, intertwining discourse filled with unidentifiable melancholy and gentle, complex humor.

This is Zippy the Pinhead meets Joe Sacco -- it's an absurd comment on the everyday lives of the people and places in an urban landscape, but it's also pitch-perfect "reporting" on the field of existential battle.

Enough trying to explain; I simply suggest you check it out. If it's your cup of tea, you'll be very happy . . . and a touch sad.

Printable Tire says

Here's something that explores loves of mine I never put a name to: obscure bureaucratic extravagances, old men secret societies and subcultures, esoteric yet unglamorous occupations and specialty stores, the philosophic and often existential ruminations embedded in everyday objects. Almost ever strip is perfect, the art serviceable blueprints of the Lou Jacobi-looking Julius Knipl's investigations of some material fantasy-plane of New York.

But I've found out too much of any good thing can get repetitive, and since every strip is telling essentially the same story (but with different ingredients) it's hard to muster some forwarding enthusiasm to read this book front to back, left to right. I'd suggest instead just dipping in every once in a while.

Kirk says

This was our third entry in the Jewish graphic novels series and a much harder sell, in part because there is no following Spiegelman's *Maus* and because this book isn't really a novel: it's a collection of strips that appeared in *The Forward* and the *Village Voice* from 1988 to the mid-90s. Katchor's technique is to tap into the tradition of Jewish absurdism and give it a contemporary, ironic tweak. The results can be remote and emotionally distancing at first, but once you appreciate the warmth of the nostalgia for the local, ethnic NYC of the 40s and 50s lost to the Disneyfication and Starbucks Urban Renewals phenomena of our times. Katchor celebrates the neighborhood quirks and characters, the odd businesses and union coalitions, and the sad tendencies of diners. Some of the scenarios are hilariously farfetched: a nail-biting salon where men go to nibble away their anxieties, the Drowning Man's society, the Panty Waist Fitters Union. The humor veers toward melancholy though: a panel in which Knipl goes to the post office after midnight to check his mail--carefully stepping over the bodies of works who've passed out from the fumes of licked stamped and envelope flaps--is damn near *Bartlebyesque* by its conclusion.

Frederic says

A superb, surrealistic vision of a slightly-alternate New York and of modern life. Not an easy or lazy read, one has to put a little effort into not just the story but the art, with all its details (the wordplay buried in store and product names, and newspaper headlines, tucked away in backgrounds and foregrounds, is amusing and rewarding). Most of the stories here are single-page 8-panel strips (there are a few two-pagers, and an extended narrative to close out the book), but they have a cumulative effect that encourages deeper thought about urban life and human existence. I had never been around papers carrying his work, but having found it will be reading all I can get my hands on.

Al says

This graphic novel is one of the strangest I've read, but I love it! The scenes are of a large city like New

York, filled with strange businesses like the society for drowned men, the Combinator Dream paper that chronicles everyone's dreams, a real estate theme park with each apartment on a tram line running through it. My favorite line: "Goat curry and a middle-aged librarian, that's what I'm in the mood for."

Iain says

It is often said that the line between genius and madness is a thin one, especially in artists' works. Ben Katchor, in his semi-regular comic "Julius Knipl: Real Estate Photographer", not only straddles that line, but also falls over one side, or the other, unnervingly often. Reading a collection of his urban vignettes in comic-form is much like gold-mining: there is treasure to be found, but a great deal of time will be spent shoveling through worthless dirt. He seems to spend far too much time attempting to manufacture the quirks of character observation found in similar observers of the urban condition, all the way from the Fitzgeralds and Hemingways of the heyday of the 20th-Century American novel, to the R. Crumbs and Harvey Pekar of the comic-essay form of the 60's and beyond.

Still, Katchor understands the peculiarly lonely nature of the forgotten working-class of the inner-city, and their increasingly tenuous connection to, and expression in, the throwaway nostalgia of the post-WWII urban utopia that never truly existed beyond the seven-inch confines of a cathode-ray television-tube. If he could lose his apparent belief, seemingly common to too many writers, that if your point-of-reference isn't New York City, or a near-approximation thereof, your writing isn't gritty, isn't real enough, then his material might improve overall to the level of his best moments.

If nothing else, Katchor does have promise, and the introduction to this collection, written by Michael Chabon, is worth reading for itself. Chabon gets it; someday, Katchor might as well.

David says

I would be hard-pressed to come up with a less intriguing title than this one. Nothing screams obnoxious independent comic like an obstinately boring title, so I was pleasantly surprised by how much I enjoyed it.

I picked it up after reading Michael Chabon's essay about it in *Maps and Legends*, and was quite impressed. While many of the strips include Julius Knipl, he is more an observer of Katchor's surreal city than a participant. Knipl walks a city of nostalgia, of melancholy workmen whose livelihoods are crumbling. But lest it seem overly serious, the occupations, businesses, and lifestyles that fill the city are imaginary. It is a city brimming with connoisseurs of smoked cigarette butts, theater critics focusing on tour bus presentations, building-wide liquid soap heists, penitentiary amusement parks, nail-biting salons, and virtuosos who play old radiators to packed apartments.

The art is its own homage to bygone days, with the square bodies and shadow washes of Dick Tracy. It's a far cry from most contemporary comic art, not least because you'd have a hard time finding a single attractive character in the book. They all have character and personality, but they can at times blend together.

There is a beautiful irony to a work so nostalgic for a time that is unabashedly fictional. Katchor's acceptance of a fact that so often eludes the nostalgic is charming and commendable. Add to this his poetic phrasing and absurdly odd perspective, and you have a delightful read on your hands. As far as graphic fiction goes, however, Katchor's work is fairly dense. He writes with a subtlety that is rare, even among good graphic

fiction.

If you find a copy somewhere, flip through it. Each strip stands on its own, and you can see if Katchor's old-timey city dreamscape is the kind of place you'd like to spend some time. I know I enjoyed my trip.

Alan says

Ben Katchor, in the wry confines of [Julius Knipl, Real Estate Photographer](#), strikes a note of sustained surrealism that both satisfies and sparks new desires. Moody and subtle, Katchor's lopsided sketches complement the text with which the images are awash.

Julius Knipl is inundated by proper names that carry the weight of specificity. Company logos on buildings and trucks: the Doloroso Theater; the Hylozoic Cafe; the Atlantic Ocean Laundry. Newspapers, like the "Daily Pigeon" and the "Evening Combinator" with its cargo of dreams. People like Morris Borzhak with his layaways all across town, or Emmanuel Chirrup, the skid-proof-slipper tycoon in his six-story apartment house on Azure Avenue. Products such as Becalm aerosol tranquilizer, or double-breasted stevedore-style loafing suits. By the accumulation of these tokens, the reader becomes aware that the familiar city Knipl lives in, while it bears some similarity to our own little old New York, is not within the bounds of reality.

Knipl's city is real enough, though, for each keen observation of human emotion to cause a shiver of recognition:

"A man, struck by the realization that everything in his refrigerator is an imitation or mock version of some once 'real' product, weeps into a paper towel."

or

"But such devastation from sitting at a desk five days a week?"

Michael Chabon's lyrical introduction to this collection is not to be missed, either. It piques the interest without sullyng the flavor.

A foray into this world will not go unrewarded.

David Schaafsma says

I had thought Knipl was a kind of adolescent joke name from Katchor, and a good silly one, and I wouldn't have put it past him, but nope, "knipl" is more meaningful, Michael Chabon tells us in his lovely introduction, it means "nest egg" and as he points out, that fits for comics, and maybe especially for MacArthur-award winning comics genius Katchor, whose book is a large collection of strips focused on real estate and economics and urban working class Jewish men living in a nostalgic fantasy version of New York City.

Katchor is all about the past, with an ever-present blend of humor, melancholy and surrealism. It takes a bit of work to read him because he can also be dense, complex, quirky, and deeply ironic, but at his best he hopes you see anew the urban world you thought you knew. Are you thinking maybe Kafka? Sure, but there is more humor here than in Kafka, maybe (though I have heard Kafka laughed harder than anyone else when he read his own stories to his friends, so maybe Kafka is right for thinking go Katchor's tone), and a very specific insight into material culture, consumerism, the struggle to survive, and, I don't know, pop culture. Kind of amazing stuff. The book is large, so there's a lot of strips to read, but wth, you don't have to read all

of them!

Anjan says

Best read prior to sleeping while laying over the side of a bed under a red light bulb.

Emily says

These comics are smart, specific, weird, sad, and funny, all at once. Some of my favorites were: "The Holey Pocket League," "The Lay-Away Planner," "The Siren Query Brigade," "The Staple in the Danish," "The Smell of the Post Office," "The Stasis Day Parade," "The Electric Eye," and "The Evening Combinator."

aneurysm1985 says

Time for a naysayer to enter this wall-to-wall palace of 5-star reviews.

To me, reading Julius Knipl, Real Estate Photographer is a slog. And a slog is the opposite of what the comics medium should deliver.

Comics - with its combination of words *and* pictures - allows writers the ability to convey information in a way that is far more efficient and readable than prose text. See: Scott McCloud's excellent book on the subject.

Ben Katchor chooses not to use this potential. He instead opts to make the reading experience *more* taxing than it ought to be.

These Julius Knipl stories are over-written, and and told in deliberately reader unfriendly ways. My biggest irk is the constant use of both narration captions *and* speech balloons in almost every single panel of the comics. By doing this, Katchor provides his readers with more information than they can absorb at once, forcing them to read and re-read the comic multiple times until they understand what is happening on each of the three layers of narration, dialogue and artwork.

The problem is that Katchor writes his narration and dialogue so that they clash with each other, rather than feed into each other. Masterful works like Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* show how comics writers can seamlessly combine the full gamut of narrative and dialogue tools, provided that they are employed with the reader in mind. Katchor seems to write with himself in mind, or anyone else who has a spare couple of minutes to reread the comic and unpick the logic of each strip.

To understand what I mean, read the strip "The Impresario of Human Drudgery" on page 49 of this book: a rare example of a Julius Knipl comic that is told primarily through dialogue, without the narration constantly derailing the reader's attention. Notice how easy and pleasurable that strip is to read! It is a rare contrast to the heavy-handed writing of most Julius Knipl comics. Why couldn't more strips have been written in this light-handed way?

In conclusion: I love the artwork, I love the style, and I usually love the underlying jokes. But I hate the

execution.

Then again, the people who love Julius Knipl seem to delight in their dense, cerebral style. So maybe I'm missing the point altogether.

PS: please note that this book is a collection of 89 one-page 'Sunday'-style comics, with an additional 17-page storyline tacked on the end. Despite some readers listing it in their lists of 'favourite graphic novels', this is *not* a graphic novel.
