

## **EGSM – Graphic Novels**

### **Content Warnings**

- Explicit language
- Sexual references
- Discussions of: depression & mental illness, zombies & apocalypse
- Mentions of: food, body horror, grief (inc. post-partum), alcoholism, misogyny, sexual assault

### **RHYS**

The funny thing is like something extreme happened in the book and then her dad was just like oh are you going to write this into a comic too? And she's like, no and I'm like I'm reading this comic!

**(laughing)**

### **[Show Theme - Intro]**

### **HELEN**

Hello friends and fans and welcome to Enthusiasm. The show where we talk about a few of our favourite things. I am your host, Helen Gould, one of the best Rusty Quillers and today we're talking about graphic novels, a very exciting genre of literature. And, I am – ooh, what's a novels related thing that means happy? – indescribably delighted to be joined by Ben, Gavia, Marisa and

Rhys. As always we shall introduce ourselves alphabetically so Ben, I'm afraid, you're going first. Can you tell us your pronouns and what you do?

**BEN**

Yeah so I'm Ben Meredith. He/him. I'm a game designer and voice actor and Rusty Quill regular.

**HELEN**

Yeah! Next up Gavia.

**GAVIA**

Hi, I'm Gavia Baker-Whitelaw. She/her. I am the co-host of the movie podcast Overinvested. I also co-edit a fan fic newsletter called The Rec Centre and I am a staff writer at the Daily Dot where I do film reviews and TV reviews and that sort of thing.

**HELEN**

Wonderful. Marisa, how about you?

**MARISA**

Yeah my name is Marisa Ewing. My pronouns are she/her. I am one of the audio editors for Rusty Quill and I also own a production company called Hemlock Creek Productions.

**HELEN**

And next, Rhys.

**RHYS**

Hi, I'm Rhys Tirado. I'm the tech person at Rusty Quill, tech person at my day job. I write for the Mnemosyne podcast and I'm just overall a writer.

**HELEN**

Alright. Ok. Ah I'm really excited to talk about this because it's been a long time since I read a graphic novel actually. Speaking of, let's get stuck in with what was the first graphic novel or comic book that you read? Would anyone like to cast their minds back into the dusty sands of time?

**BEN**

I guess stretching the definition of graphic novel, probably more into comic book but I'm gonna say very Britishly, the Beano and the Dandy.

**HELEN**

Oh my gosh, I completely forgot about those. Shall we explain those for our American listeners?

**MARISA**

I do not know what that is.

**GAVIA**

I also read those as a child!

**HELEN**

They were both comic books with like funny cartoon strips in them with different regular appearances. And for me, it wasn't so much the comics, it was the big...

**BEN**

Annuals

**HELEN**

...bumper editions you'd get. Yes the annual ones at the end of every year. So you had the Bash Street Kids and Dennis the Menace...

**BEN**

But not the Dennis the Menace that a lot of people might be thinking about.

**GAVIA**

Not American Dennis the Menace, horrible British Dennis the Menace

**BEN**

Yep

**HELEN**

There's an American?

**BEN**

Yeah Dennis the Menace in America is like a blond kid with dungarees who annoys his neighbour.

**HELEN**

What?! No!

**BEN**

Yeah it's like really nice Dennis the Menace

**GAVIA**

The UK version is much more menacing.

**BEN**

Yeah

**HELEN**

Our Dennis the Menace has really messy black hair and a black and red top and a dog called Gnasher and uses his dog to threaten the general public.

**(laughing)**

**MARISA**

Oh! Alright.

**HELEN**

And then the Dandy is similar. I mostly remember that there was a character who ate pies.

**BEN**

Desperate Dan

**GAVIA**

Yeah

**HELEN**

Desperate Dan! Yes.

**BEN**

Who was a big cowboy who ate whole pies plate and all.

**GAVIA**

There's a big statue of him in Scotland because the publisher's in Dundee

**(laughing)**

**HELEN**

Ah, that's really funny. Does he have a pie?

**GAVIA**

I assume so. It's been a while since I visited old Dan.

**(laughing)**

**HELEN**

That's a little insight into the British childhood of like, up until...I mean are they still being published?

**GAVIA**

Oh yeah

**BEN**

Yeah!

**HELEN**

Oh well then, current childhood too. Anyone else? Gavia I think you were going to say something as well about your first...?

**GAVIA**

Yeah my first comics were the Asterix books which I read just as I was learning to read because I wasn't very enthusiastic about reading as like a six year old but I loved Asterix and I remember, as a very young child, my parents taking me to an adult lecture with the woman who translated all the Asterix books from French and I was just incredibly impressed by her and I was like wow,

now I understand what translation is because you have to do all these puns and things from the French to the English.

**HELEN**

Of course. That's really interesting. I'd completely forgotten about Asterix existing. This is what this episode is for, to remind us of all the excellent things that we've forgotten about. Marisa? Rhys?

**RHYS**

Yeah I was just thinking like...god...I remember the series, it was like the Bone Saga or something and it was just about like these little white humanoid figures that, like, for some reason...I guess they're all related, they're known as the Bones or something. I remember like reading that and being super into it and I cannot remember the plot for the life of me.

**(laughing)**

I was...it was the first graphic novel ever that I was just like ok let me pick this up and I would read through it and then I'm just like this is not going to stick with me ever, but it's something that like if you...if you showed me the graphic novel I'd be like "oh I remember that." Don't know what happens in it. I just don't.

**HELEN**

(laughing) Marisa then

**MARISA**

Yeah so I'm actually relatively new in the world of graphic novels just because growing up they were pretty expensive and I kind of got into them through web comics and just being on Tumblr and reading comics like that but the first one that I actually read was the Enigma of Amigara Fault by Junji Ito.

**(laughing)**

**HELEN**

Is that the one with the holes?

**GAVIA**

The deep end.

**MARISA**

Yeah that was the one with the holes shaped in the cliff that fit a specific person. So that was definitely one way to jump into things but then I just went down the horror graphic novel rabbit hole for sure.

**RHYS**

I only know that from the meme.

**MARISA**

Yeah you should definitely take a look at it if you're not squeamish. It's very good.

**HELEN**

I really...I really need to get into Junji Ito's stuff. I read the spiral one as well.

**MARISA**

Yeah I'm reading that one right now. I just got it from the comic book store two days ago. I'm already like...

**HELEN**

Yeah

**MARISA**

It's something. It's really all I can say without spoiling it.

**HELEN**

And it's just so extraordinarily detailed as in the lines and the drawings of it.

**MARISA**

Yeah I have been into horror for quite some time and I think I've kind of desensitised myself to it so finding something that still makes me kind of like physically recoil after I've read it is rare but these ones definitely do that.

**HELEN**

Yeah there was something I mentioned in, I think, the horror books episode about how I heard from this YouTuber that there's...in Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark, you'll turn over a page and there'll be a horrible illustration on it and it's like getting jump scared by a book and I think the Junji Ito also does that.

**(laughing)**

**GAVIA**

Actually I was meaning to say because the title of the podcast is graphic novels but then the intro email was also comics and I'm like I hope it includes all of the comic things because sequential comics is kind of an ambiguous term.

**BEN**

It does feel like a broadly meaningless distinction doesn't it? Like I don't know...

**MARISA**

I think it's an interesting distinction though because some web comics feel longer than actual novels or graphic novels but they have a lot of the same elements. Sometimes they'll have audio. I know it's kind of a lot but Home Stuck is a good example.

**HELEN**

Yeah there we go!

**MARISA**

But it's one of those things where it's definitely laid in the form of a graphic novel other than the observed videos that they slip in there.

**GAVIA**

In a way isn't Home Stuck technically an opera

**MARISA**

Oh Lord

**(laughing)**

**HELEN**

Did anyone follow that web comic series, the guy who made it was called Alec Robins. I can't remember what he called it but it was about being married to Betty Boop

**MARISA**

Oh yeah

**BEN**

My friends really like it. I can't remember the name of it.

**GAVIA**

Was that on Twitter where it was like...

**HELEN**

Yes, yeah

**GAVIA**

...an ongoing series and he was always cucked by some rabbit or something.

**HELEN**

Yeah

**GAVIA**

Ok

**HELEN**

Well not really. He and Betty Boop were very much in love.

**MARISA**

Yeah it's called Mr Boop

**HELEN**

Mr Boop, that's what it was called.

**GAVIA**

Maybe it was an open marriage and I misinterpreted the couple of comics. That is also not a word that I would typically use but that was the framing of the joke that I saw on Twitter I think.

**(laughing)**

**HELEN**

In many ways it was quite a sincere exploration of someone who is desperately in love with their partner.

**GAVIA**

Who is Betty Boop

**HELEN**

Yeah, yeah, portrayed as Betty Boop. And there were several comics that just...the punchline was just him being like “god, I can’t believe I’m married to Betty Boop”

**(laughing)**

That was a fun little thing. I think it’s finished now but I haven’t been tracking it lately. I just realised I didn’t mention the first graphic novel/comic book that I looked at. I mean if we have...if we’re going by comic books then it was definitely the Beano. Yeah the first one I came across, like graphic novel wise, was The Crow and it very much influenced by art GCSE projects at one point. It

was kind of revelatory to me because I was like I didn't realise that comics could do this and be really fucking tragic. And it also introduced me to the concept of a revenge drama which is still a very fun genre for me.

**MARISA**

I think that graphic novels and comics sometimes get, not a bad rep, but people usually only think of them in terms of superhero stories so then when you have these novels...one that I read recently was called *The Man That Came Down the Attic Stairs* which is a horror novel which deals with postpartum grief. And you'll have things like that, that feel like they come out of left field because when you think of graphic novels you really tend to focus on superheroes and action.

**HELEN**

Yeah

**MARISA**

But I kind of really like graphic novels as a tool for exploring either grief or just hard topics in general because you can illustrate things that are hard to put into words.

**RHYS**

I find myself really enjoying autobiographical novels or at least comics that are along the lines of autobiography...like it's just comics telling their story. It's a...so this author does...the first one is called *My Lesbian Experience With Loneliness* and when I read it I was like she just like me for real

**(laughing)**

I was just like, oh this is my whole life! That's great, fantastic. And so I've been collecting all...all of it. Just all of the ones that she's made because it kind of helped me realise, oh ok, I'm not totally alone in this. I get this. And half the time...sometimes the things that happen are just really funny and I'm just like this is very sad and I'm so sorry but it's so funny, out of context. Like the last...I think the last one is called...because every one of them is...so the first one is My Lesbian Experience With Loneliness. Then it's My Solo Exchange Diary 1 and 2 and then the one I've just shown on camera was My Alcoholic Escape From Reality. And so the last one is more about her relationship with alcohol which a lot of it I was just like I relate to this a little bit too hard. The funny thing is like something extreme happened in the book and then her dad was just like oh are you going to write this into a comic too? And she's like, no and I'm like I'm reading this comic!

**(laughing)**

And I'm just like this is really funny but I can only imagine how upset her dad is. So I dunno, I've just been finding myself really enjoying autobiographical graphic novels. They're really good for, I guess, not feeling so alone and whatever you're dealing with.

**HELEN**

I think that goes for all literature though. What's that...ah, there's a James Baldwin quote somewhere. He says something like "you think that you are the

only person to have experienced this depth of emotion and then you read a book”

**RHYS**

Yes

**GAVIA**

Oh is that where he’s like oh you read Dostoevsky and you realise that Dostoevsky experienced this 100 years ago or maybe it’s another Russian.

**RHYS**

Yeah. With this specific novel it’s like...I grew up thinking this is an incredibly, like unique set of experience that I’m having. I’m black, I’m a lesbian, I’m non-binary, I’m in the closet – sort of. It was just like...to me it felt like such a small thing and then I’m reading what she’s going through and I’m like I’m not the only one. Fantastic. We should all make a club and just meet up and hang out and it’s probably not ever gonna happen but I’m just like I love this so much. I love the fact that I’m not alone. And I think that actually I came across this when I went to...god what is that one bookstore? There’s a bookstore in New York that I would frequent when I lived in New York. I can’t even remember. It was like a queer bookstore so it had all...an entire range of different books, even graphic novels and so when I came across that there I was just like oh this looks interesting to me and then I went and bought it and I was like oh this is the only thing that matters to me for the rest of my life.

**(laughing)**

**HELEN**

I think that's very relatable. I'm still thinking about whether there is a difference between graphic novels and comics.

**MARISA**

For me the main distinction seems to be that graphic novels are typically self-contained. Like there might possibly be a couple volumes but I think, like you know, you might have up to six but a lot of them are just you pick up the book, you read it and you're done but comics seem to evolve and change over time. And that's one of the reasons that I'm not as into comics just because it's hard of where do you start when this character has existed for 40 years.

**BEN**

That's quite interesting because I guess...because one of the big ones that got me...because I, you know, had kids sort of like Beano, Dandy, Asterix that kind of stuff but then I didn't read anything at all. I'm not in superheroes like Marvel and DC comics or anything like that but I picked up the Wicked and the Divine because apparently my tastes are anything that's published by Image but the Wicked and the Divine it has...it released as weekly issues like any of your comics but then it's a finite story and then it's bundled into larger volumes and there are about, I think, eight volumes or so.

**GAVIA**

Yeah a lot of them are the monthly release thing. It's one of these sort of age old debates that happens at loads of comic conventions. It's like what do you

classify Sandman as because it's 12 volumes long and it was released by DC and it's like, you know, shrug. Some things are definitely a graphic novel and other things are kind of ambiguous I guess.

**HELEN**

Yeah

**BEN**

I just feel like a graphic novel is a comic book that you're trying to sell to somebody who doesn't like comics.

**(laughing)**

**GAVIA**

I think like Alan Moore was like "it's a marketing term and I have no strong opinion because it's just there to tell people whether to buy Watchmen or not."

**BEN**

It sort of ascribes worthiness to something, if you're like oh no, no, no this isn't a comic. It's a graphic novel

**MARISA**

That's really interesting.

**RHYS**

Yeah I was just gonna say going back to what Marisa said of not knowing where to start reading a comic when a character has existed for like 40 something years. This is why I only ever pick up, when it comes to indie comics...when it comes to comics I always pick up indie comics. So, I brought a couple of them here.

**HELEN**

More show and tell. Yes

**RHYS**

So this one, Surrounded by Death, is a zombie comic and so the way...the way I happened upon this, of course being the nerd I am, it was Comicon and I was just walking around because there's always...in Comicon there's artists alleys so a lot of people are there to try and sell their own comics. So I'm walking around and I see this guy who's selling something zombie related and I'm like, ok, I like zombies, that's cool. I go over and talk to him, he gives me a pitch and I was just like alright, I'll buy your comic. So I pay him, I go home, I start getting into it. Sometimes I do, sometimes I just kind of leave it there to collect dust but this time I was like let me open this up and read it and I got immediately hooked because the whole premise of this comic are these guys...a zombie apocalypse happens, there's a group of people that start to live in...there's a community of people now living in the mall, right, and everything is pretty much more or less ok. They've got supplies, they've got what they need but then the worst thing that could possibly happen happens; and it's the fact that their favourite coffee runs out. And so everyone goes nuts. They're

like, we want our coffee. And the leaders are just like, are you really going to have us risk our lives just so you can have coffee and then one of the leaders has a crush on this character – who, by the way never shows up. You never see this character on camera which is wild to me. But I kinda find this really funny. And she's just like, yeah guys don't worry about it and the leader is like actually never mind, we're gonna go get the coffee. And so to me it just feels very human that in the midst of this entire zombie situation they're like damn we're gonna really need coffee if we're gonna not be at each other's throats. So I read that all in...it was only two issues that he sold me. So I read it all and I went back to...because I had a three day ticket to Comicon, went back the next day, found the guy. I was like, I need to know what happens next and he's like did you actually read that. I'm like, yes. Tell me what happens next. And to this day we're mutuals on Twitter because I was like this is brilliant. I want more. And I ended up like...I think this was on Kickstarter so he published it himself on Kickstarter. And so me it's....I love comics but I love to get into more indie comics. Like DC and Marvel is fine, the only Marvel comics I own are like America Chavez and that's because she looks like me, like, full on. But when it comes to comics I prefer going to indie comics because I don't have to stress about where do I start? From the beginning. There's only one beginning.

## HELEN

I'm the same. Tell you what let's take a little break and when we come back let's talk some more about our favourite...maybe your favourite storylines and favourite things that we've read and we'll see how we get on.

**[BREAK]**

**HELEN**

And welcome back. Ok, so, let's talk about our favourites now. I wanna hear the stories and graphic novels and/or comics that you have most enjoyed over the years or that is one that you keep coming back to. I will say I was really into Saga for a while and then I caught up and realised I had to wait and then other stuff happened and now I am not caught up again and I've got no idea what's going on. I'm now I'm trying to think how to describe what Saga is.

**GAVIA**

Well it's very long.

**HELEN**

Yeah. It's like...

**BEN**

Romeo and Juliet but...

**HELEN**

In space

**BEN**

Space opera

**HELEN**

From the perspective of Romeo and Juliet's child. And Saga I think is the one with the cat.

**BEN & GAVIA**

The lying cat.

**HELEN**

Yeah. So there's a cat and it can tell you if you lie and it will go "lie" if you do that. This is a useful pet to have. But, yeah that is one of my favourites. What about you?

**MARISA**

I think one of my current favourites, my wife got me this one for Christmas, it's called Secret Life and it's basically the happenings of the company which they don't explain what the company is or does but it just focuses on different people that work there but it has kind of that same incomprehensible vibe as Welcome to Night Vale where you listen to an episode and you're like why is there an angel in this town but then just kind of accept that there's an angel in the town. So it's...

**HELEN**

Oh I love that.

**MARISA**

...a very similar vibe to that but it all takes place in this very secretive and possibly evil company and it focuses on a janitor, a secretary, a woman that just approves things. Her job is just stamping an approval stamp on paper. Just follows them as they work at this company and it's so good.

**HELEN**

I'd love to have that job.

**MARISA**

And it's in my brain now. I've finished it a day after I got it and I'm about ready to read it again because it was so weird but so interesting and it's hard to even like, at times, recognise what's going on. You're just like...why are the janitors like this? What is going on? But it's so, so good. I can't recommend it enough. It's so good.

**HELEN**

And it was called...what did you say it was called?

**MARISA**

It's called Secret Life by Theo Ellsworth but apparently it's an adaptation of a story by Jeff Vandabeer but I've never read the original story. I've just read the graphic novel and it has this very weird, distorted...I don't know if you can see but this very weird, distorted art style but it's...

**HELEN**

Ooh. Fun. Ben, what about you?

**BEN**

I've got the last thing or like new thing that I've read which was bought for me as a gift but it's Ronald Wimberly's Prince of Cats which I've got a lot of adaptations because this is literally Romeo and Juliet but retold in, I think, like 80s New York but with samurai swords

**HELEN**

Ooh

**BEN**

It's very cool and it is just one volume so it just goes through...oh sorry, no it's also...it's not Romeo and Juliet. It's Romeo and Juliet as told from the perspective of, I wanna say Mercutio but I can't remember. The one who's called Prince of Cats but I can't remember.

**HELEN**

I think that is Mercutio.

**BEN**

Yeah so Mercutio is the main character and it's how his life intersects with the main story of Romeo and Juliet but it's very cool, very stylish, it's just great stuff. And then the other one I have which started off as a web comic, or like sorry, is a web comic and again both of these are published by Image but has

been turned into a physical copy is Kill 6 Billion Demons by Tom Parkinson-Morgan

**HELEN**

Oh yes

**BEN**

Or Abbadon which is just fantastically stylish, about a girl called Alison who gets a cosmic key pushed into her head by a ghost horse knight man who appears in her bedroom and then she gets transported to the realm of god. Or to heaven but not really heaven. But it's great. It's really just quite wild. The art style is beautiful but the one thing about the physical copies as I have here, I've got the three volumes and they're all different sizes which is awful.

**(laughing)**

It's really nice and I wanted the actual art on paper so that I could properly look at it closely but I really hope they reissue these as a standard size so I can buy them all again.

**HELEN**

Gavia, what about you? What's your favourite?

**GAVIA**

Mine is a series called Finder by Carla Speed McNeil who started publishing these comics in the mid 90s and has continued through to now, the most

recent volume came out last year and it's not very well known but it has a very dedicated following which explains why it's still going. The closest kind of comparison I would make from more mainstream, I guess, like geek culture would be Terry Pratchett because it's a fantasy-ish setting. It's a sci fi fantasy, somewhat contemporary seeming culture but there's a lot of individual stories with different characters and subgenres within the world that Carla's created. So they describe it as aboriginal science fiction so the main character is kind of like an indigenous analogue character in the world of the story and then there's like also...also there's like sort of American white cultures as well. There's a lot of stuff that kind of overlaps with the present day but it's very clearly like a sci-fi fantasy world and yeah, there's every genre in there and the main character is this guy who...he's this sin eater so he kind of has to take the blame for ritual crimes and stuff and he just goes around having little adventures but mostly it's not in an adventure narrative, it's more in the style of a Gen X memoir comic where it's just like a bunch of queer people hanging out in a bar having social problems but then, you know, there'll be a fantasy thing. It's very hard to describe but it's a really fantastic multi genre comic with lots of different characters that always feels fresh with each new section of the world you explore.

### **HELEN**

Am I right in thinking that the origin of the concept of a sin eater is like when someone died you would transfer their sins into cakes or something and then someone would eat the cakes.

### **GAVIA**

Yeah, I mean it's kind of based on various real world ideas and concepts.

**HELEN**

I need to look that up because that's such an interesting...that's one of those weird little jobs from history that I just love.

**GAVIA**

He's like the ritual scapegoat which is what he is.

**HELEN**

Yes

**GAVIA**

Kind of positioned within the culture that he was raised in but also kind of his job is the title of the comic which is Finder so he's really good at finding stuff and that is a skill that can be put on to any problem and means that he can go to different place and be like the "finder" in different scenarios and that's how the narrative is structured.

**HELEN**

That sounds super cool. Rhys, how about you? Any particular favourites you wanna talk about?

**RHYS**

I know we were trying to stay away from Marvel however...

## HELEN

It's ok, we haven't really mentioned them so far so we can...we can shove this in at the end.

## RHYS

Yes ok. So I just really love America Chavez. She looks like me. I cosplay as her all the time. So basically she's supposed to be like...I guess you know how the redo like superheroes every couple of years. So there was a superhero called Miss America. I think the original was like blonde, white woman. Remade her into this really cool Latina who...the weird...ok, so what I really loved about her origin is she is literally like an actual alien from space and yet, like her entire culture is literally Latin culture. So the creators are like, ok, so if white people can have their culture in space why can't we do that. And I was like, you know what, you're right. You're valid. Absolutely just big brained. I could not have done that better myself. So she's literally this alien who can fly, she's literally bulletproof and she can punch holes into other dimension and also time. She's just super cool and I'm like, you know what, she could've defeated Thanos. That's just how it could've gone. She could've just defeated Thanos. She's relatively new I'm gonna say so there's not a lot out there about...at least this rendition of her which I'm grateful for because then it doesn't...I'm not like trying to hunt down every, single comic that she's ever been in which I have done. I've read everything about her except for the newest one because they took a turn somewhere and I was like I don't like that. So I really love America Chavez and I can't wait to see her in the new Doctor Strange movie this year. They should've just casted me but you know what, I'm not gonna be salty about that. It's fine.

**(laughing)**

**HELEN**

There's always next time.

**RHYS**

Always next time.

**HELEN**

So I've got quite a broad reaching question next. What do we think it is about graphic novels and comics that's appealing as opposed to a book that's just words or a cartoon or other visual media. What is about them that we like? I think for me I like that I'm kind of speed running the story. Like I can finish a whole book...

**GAVIA**

I think that comics are kind of like poetry because the volume of words is very small compared to a novel

**HELEN**

Yes

**GAVIA**

And technically you can read it really fast but they have to condense a vast amount of information and emotional impact into a really small amount of page space and if you get really invested it gets into your brain correctly. So

it's like...that's what makes comics unique as a medium. It's different from watching a movie where you're not in control of the speed at which you're absorbing the story. So you can kind of go back and be like I'm kind of getting it at this speed. And then just also the experience of seeing someone else's aesthetic because you're like you're not required to visualise anything. Like I'm not very good at visualising stuff so I like seeing really imaginative art, my favourite artists are usually people who just have really interesting, complex, fantasy landscapes visually because I just find that really cool and impressive so that's, you know...

### **BEN**

And I definitely agree about the...seeing somebody else visualise something because when you read a book you have your own brain so I at least tend to imagine things in roughly the same way because I'm the one imagining them whereas this...yeah this, it's being realised in somebody else's vision and that's sometimes more interesting. I also find that there are much more...well, no, every medium is infinitely flexible with enough creativity but I feel like because it's the visual and the written meshed together it's a lot easier to get creative in a lot, a lot quicker and I think a lot more accessibly because if you think about formally weird books, you think about stuff like Ulysses and House of Leaves and stuff which are just incredibly inaccessible objects but then every, single comic and graphic novel is kind of doing what they're doing by playing around with form and the number of panels and the way they're spaced and where the speech bubbles go. I think it's just an immediate access to something that's formally very, very interesting.

**GAVIA**

And there is no requirement to spend hundreds of billions of dollars on special effects.

**BEN**

Yeah

**(laughing)**

**HELEN**

Although I think we should state that illustrations and artists are often very underpaid for the stuff that they produce. Pay your artists everybody!

**GAVIA**

Yes. That's something I end up writing quite a lot at work because there's very regularly scandals at the big two publishers in that regard.

**HELEN**

Rhys, Marisa, any thoughts on why graphic novels and comics are cool?

**MARISA**

I think it's kind of interesting because I would say for me personally graphic novels are probably one of my favourite ways to consume stories which is incredibly ironic because I am an audio editor by trade and I picked the medium that has no audio.

**(laughing)**

But I think there's...yeah, there's something about the style of graphic novels and the way that they can convey stories that I think is really interesting because I feel like in film and TV there's definitely an emphasis on those visual mediums for sure but graphic novels really take it up a notch, especially in the way that you stylise things like feelings and emotions, at least in the stories that I've read that I think would look a little bit odd in film. I've seen it in some types of animated shows but I don't know, there's just something about, a full page of art out of nowhere in a graphic novel that kind of catches you off guard. I know, Helen, you mentioned the Spiral Junji Ito book and Junji Ito actually does have an anime where they took his stories and they adapted them and added sound and movement and things like that but there's really nothing better, at least in horror graphic novels, I think than when you just flip a page and things seem fine and then there's just a full spread of I don't know what the fuck that is but it's gross. That just kind of catches you off guard and I feel that that surprise, almost that jump scare, is amplified in graphic novels because in film you have the audio leading up to it. You have cameras zooming and things like that but when you just flip a page and it's something like that, it can give you a good spook and I really enjoy that.

**RHYS**

For me I like pictures. I like pretty pictures and colourful pictures. I just really enjoy a good picture. I've mentioned my friend who created the comic Sweetie. So he regularly does streams where he shows his process and so I'm just...I'm also very fascinated in the process that goes into creating a comic or graphic novel so the placement of the panels and what colour palette do you

use and even the type of font. And we all hate Comic Sans but you know what, it's really useful. So it's just...I really like just the creation and I really appreciate the creation of comics and stuff and comic artists really do not get paid enough. They really need to get paid more. They do so much work. Yeah so I'm just...and a lot of the times I kind of pick and choose what comic I'll read based on the art style because I just have...I can't do art styles that if it's primarily black and white and there's a lot of movement...so for instance, Shonen Manga, when there's a lot of action and it's mostly black and white, my brain can't make sense of what's going on. It's very hard for me to visualise it. Anything that's really easy to comprehend on the page and if add ins...throw in some colour, get fancy with it, then I'm just like, ah yes, this is so nice for me.

**HELEN**

I think that liking graphic novels and comics because the pictures is pretty is extraordinarily valid because the art quality is very, very good.

**MARISA**

So good.

**HELEN**

Extremely underrated.

**RHYS**

I also feel like it helps when there's a...when it comes to adaptations to film, going from book to film adaptation it's always...it leaves too much information up to the reader with respect to what the characters look like and what a

certain thing portrays as whereas if I see a comic and I'm just like ok, I like where this artist is going with this. I like the colours, I like the character design. I...for me character design is very important because I don't like a lot of DC Marvel stuff because sometimes they have same body syndrome where every character has the same body type and I'm just like, I'm not gonna feel comfortable...if I feel like I'm not gonna feel comfortable even trying to cosplay any of the characters I'm probably not gonna read it. So for me it's like character design is very important. So if I don't see more of a diverse set of characters then I'm just like it's probably not for me.

### **GAVIA**

I mean I really do like superhero comics but I get so frustrated with the lack of aesthetic variety in the movie adaptations because; you know in every interview with someone who's directing a DC or Marvel movie or TV show they always harp on about how dedicated they are to the comics. And it's like, oh I grew up reading Doctor Strange religiously. It's like, well I mean probably you didn't but that's fine. That's not your job to do that.

**(laughing)**

But also all of the visuals are so kind of bland compared to...I mean even like DC and Marvel is the kind of conservative side of comic book publishing but even there there's loads of really interesting artists. Like the art in the Ms Marvel comics is...it's very atypical for a superhero comic and then you watch a trailer for the TV show and you're like this kind of looks like every teen drama. So I kind of wish that just more...more movie film maker people would be allowed to express themselves in the way that comic book artists do.

**HELEN**

So here's a question. Has anyone seen the film of Sin City?

**GAVIA**

Yeah

**HELEN**

Ok. That's only half of us that's seen it then. So I won't go on about this too much but I didn't know that was a graphic novel first but in hindsight I really should've done because they really, really emulate...it's all in black and white and there's some really stark lighting and shots in it that completely look like they're from the page. And while thinking about it now, I'm not sure it was that good of a film.

**GAVIA**

Yeah, I mean, I respect that visually really distinctive. You do rewatch it now and you're like; this was very misogynistic.

**HELEN**

Yeah.

**(laughing)**

Yeah but I just wanted to mention that as an example of someone definitely being...

**GAVIA**

Well it was co-directed by the guy who did the comic which is probably part of the reason why...

**HELEN**

That...that makes sense. It was such a bizarre film. I really didn't know what I was watching at the time. I watched so much weird stuff as a teenager.

**(laughing)**

We have time for one more question. I want to talk about where you'd recommend someone who's new to the medium to start. What do you think is a good starter comic or graphic novel for someone to get into?

**GAVIA**

I'd make them fill out a genre questionnaire because it's kind of like...there's so many different fields to go into and if they were like please recommend me your favourite memoir comics I'd be like speak to Rhys but if they were like please recommend me superheroes or fantasy things I'd be able to help out. So like you need to divine someone's personality. I realise that's not helpful for recommendations to the audience but I'm like, no, I need my recommendations to be pinpointed.

**HELEN**

No, do you know what that's actually...I've asked this question about other topics before and this is actually a reasonably common answer which I really appreciate that there's lots...people think and have a lot of nuance in this but does anyone have any other ideas about it?

**BEN**

To a certain extent I'd say start with web comics because obviously the audience who's listening to this is kind of self-selecting because the barrier for entry for web comics is a decent internet connection but you're listening to a podcast so assumedly that's probably...you do probably have that. And they're free and if you like them you can go and support the person making them directly and there's just so many. I mean I personally would recommend Kill 6 Billion Demons just because it's very cool and I love it but as Gavia says, it depends what you like as a genre.

**MARISA**

Yeah I would also agree with Ben there because as someone that did the web comic to graphic novel pipeline that's definitely...they're a little bit more accessible and a little less overwhelming than walking into a graphic novel store and being like, ok where do I start. But I would actually say, to be perfectly frank, as someone that's gotten into them relatively recently, every graphic novel shop that I've gone to has been...has had staff that's been so kind and friendly with recommendations and I would say that, you know, because especially they spend so much time looking over the comics and graphic novels that they get, asking them has pointed me towards some

graphic novels that I don't think I would've picked up on my own but they're so good at giving recommendations. So as long as you know what general genre you'd like to go into, just going in and asking, I'm sure they'll be able to find something for you. It's a lot less intimidating than just wandering through the aisles and hoping you pick the right one.

### **RHYS**

So I don't know how this slipped my mind but I used to work at a comic book shop

**(laughing)**

I don't know why it took me this long to be like, oh yeah I used to work...ok. I...god, I would get this question all the time working there, like what do you recommend. And I'm just like, alright so, I'm just gonna assume you don't care for Marvel or DC because that's very open ended and also I wouldn't be able to help them either because I don't really...I don't read any Marvel or DC outside of America Chavez so a lot of the times I kind of go towards...I think the easy thing to get into is usually like middle grade comics. Just because they're...middle grade usually has a lot of different, fun premises. It's very easy. It doesn't come with hard hitting genres. There's not gonna be, oh suddenly there's sexual assault. It's usually very easy, kind of like an easy slide to go down and the artwork also differs a lot. You can find a lot of good, fun stuff. So that's where I always pointed them to but yeah it's such an open ended question what to recommend. And yeah I always go with indie comics. It's very easy to recommend indie comics because it's a lot less intimidating when, oh this character has only been in existence for four or five years versus,

oh this character has been around for 40 years and has 52 variations and all of these 52 vari...and then there's the issue with, with comics, they go out of print. So you don't want to start with a variation where, down the line, you can't find issue 32 or something. You don't wanna do that to yourself. So if people are looking to get into comics I would not recommend DC or Marvel. I would say start with an indie comic, something that's maybe a little bit more recent and yeah that's just how I would help them out.

**HELEN**

Yeah. The practical answer. I like that.

**RHYS**

I don't know why it took me so long to remember, yeah I used to work at a comic store

**(laughing)**

**HELEN**

That's so funny!

**GAVIA**

We've got a professional in the room!

**(laughing)**

**RHYS**

Oh my god

**HELEN**

Thank you listener for coming with us on this meandering discussion. I'm going to see you on the next episode but for now it's goodbye from me. Goodbye. And it's goodbye from everybody else. Do you want to say goodbye?

**EVERYONE**

Bye!

**[Show Theme - Outro]**

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**[Show Theme – Outro Ends]**

Hosted and Directed by Helen Gould

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