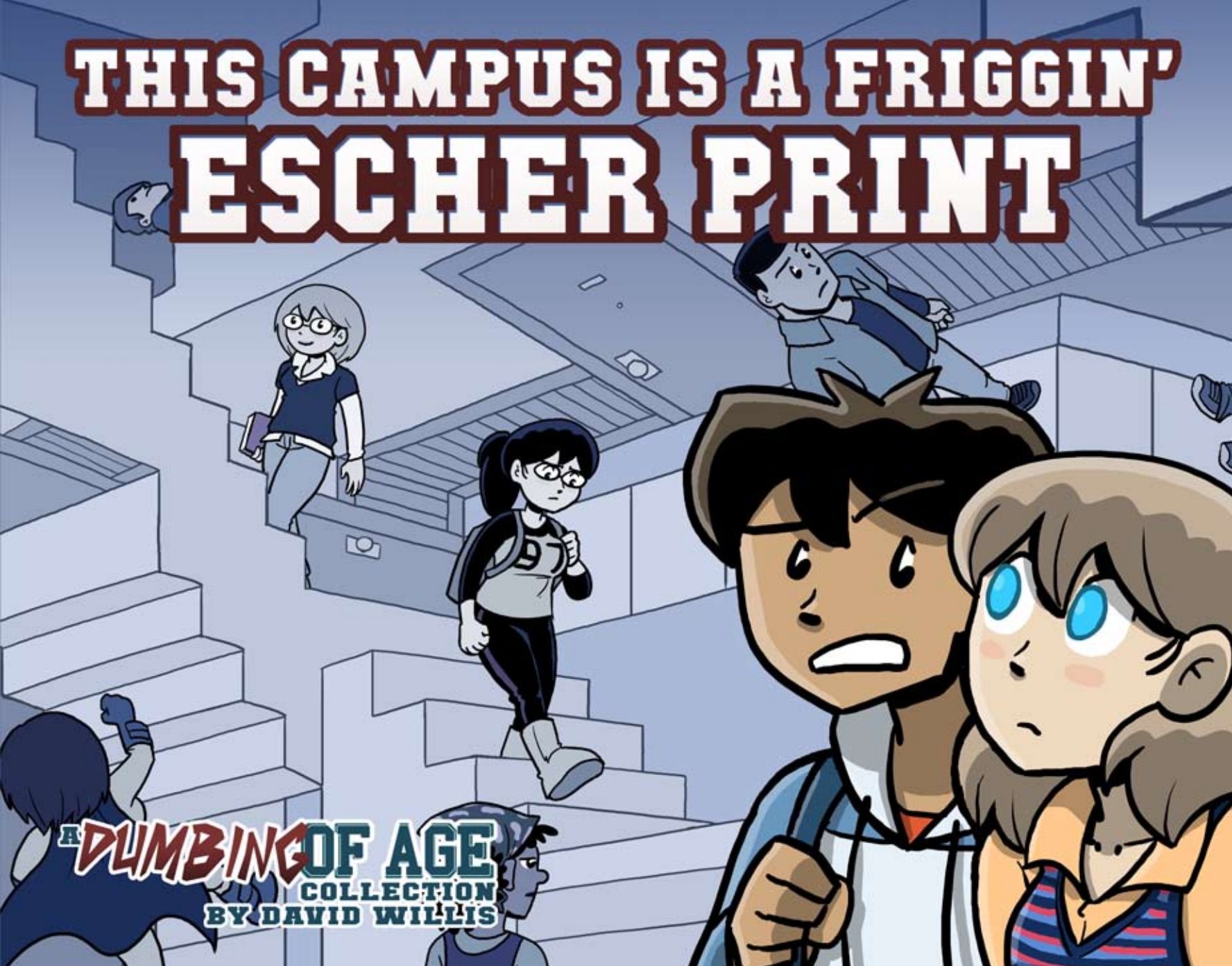


THIS CAMPUS IS A FRIGGIN' ESCHER PRINT



A DUMBING OF AGE
COLLECTION
BY DAVID WILLIS



DUMBING OF AGE

BY DAVID WILLIS



Dumbing of Age can be found online at www.dumbingofage.com

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INTRODUCTION

Childhood is spent rushing into adulthood. But once we hit twenty-one, it's all like, crap, man, slow this train down! Was that really the culmination to everything? Maybe we should have savored childhood while it was happening.

That's exactly how I feel about my first web-comic, *Roomies!*, which began in 1997. The characters grew up in more-or-less "real time," meaning they were freshmen in 1997, they were sophomores in 1998, they'd be juniors in 1999, and so on. But at just five "moments" a week, published once per weekday, you miss a lot of potential moments. The "move-in day" in *Roomies!* was two strips! Their entire first semester was 72 strips. What a brief and over-cursory look at the lives of these folks.

Thirteen years later, I'd really missed them. I hadn't written them in a long time. I'd moved on to other projects. Nobody asked me to draw them a Billie at conventions anymore. And I

knew why nobody did, since she hadn't appeared regularly in a comic strip of mine for years. And so I aimed to fix that.

Oh, I've tried before to go back and insert new stories back into the pre-existing continuity. But that's such a lifeless thing to do. You can't do real stories that way. We already know when the important stuff happens. And you can't do more important stuff. It's all been set in stone.

So I would do *Roomies!* better. I would start over. I would take everything I'd learned about cartooning in the past thirteen years, throw everything old out, and begin anew. I'd take these characters and put them in college again. I wouldn't worry about aging anyone in real time.

As contradictory as it may sound, however, I didn't want to repeat myself. I didn't want to tell the same stories all over again. That wouldn't be fun for me or the readers who had been there for the long haul, much



Billie, ca 2002

less the new folks who would be dropping in.

It wasn't until San Diego Comic Con in 2010, while shooting the breeze with Joel Watson (hijinksensue.com) that I stumbled upon the formula to make everything fresh.

You see, *Roomies!* was all about Danny and Joe. They were two dudes, and everything that happened was filtered through them. And their story was largely told. I couldn't do that story again. But there was this peripheral character to their adventures, a girl named Joyce.

Joyce, as the years of strips went by, exponentially increased in importance. I'd grown to learn that she was my real mouthpiece, the unintentional author avatar. Like her, I was a sheltered, raised-fundamentalist loon who had no idea how the world works.

And *Dumbing of Age* could be her story.

Refocusing everything around Joyce made everything suddenly make sense. *Dumbing of Age* would be about the girls wing of a co-ed dorm, versus *Roomies!*'s tale of the boys wing of a co-ed dorm.

And so here we are. This is not a retelling of old material. There are no recycled storylines, no recycled punchlines. These are only characters that have always remained true to me and dear to my heart. These guys flow freely out of my fingertips onto the page.

And you know what? It's been a year and a half into *Dumbing of Age*, and folks are asking me to draw them Billie again at conventions. I get to share these guys with you once more.

It's going to be a pleasure.

--David Willis



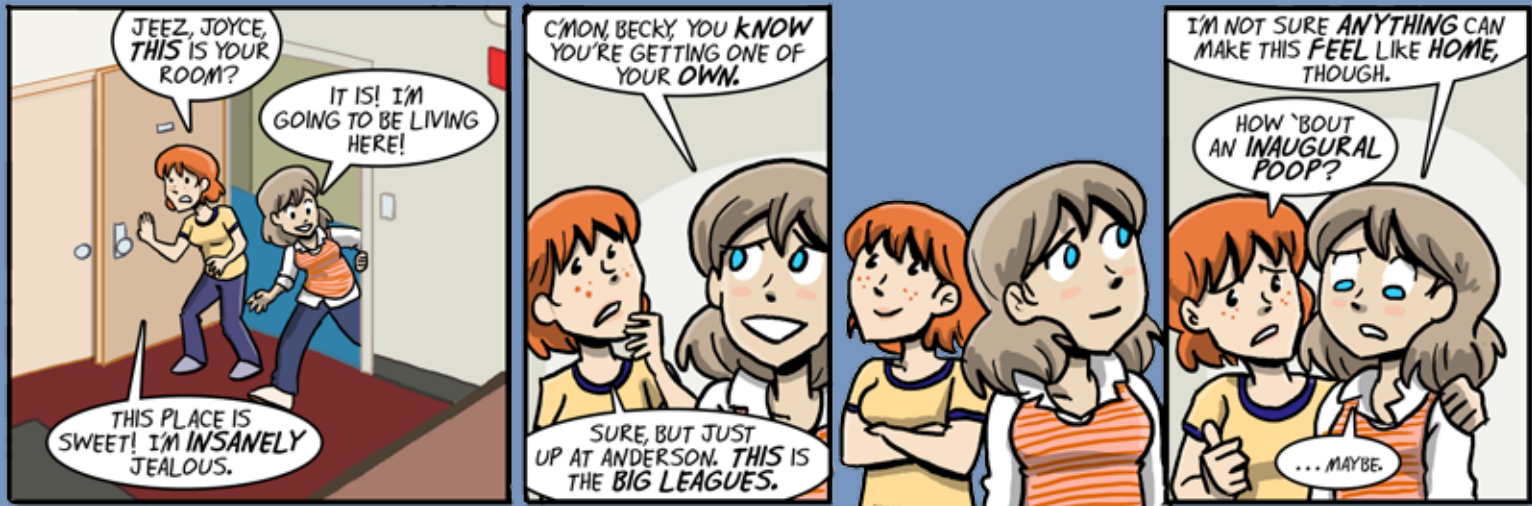
Billie, ca 2012



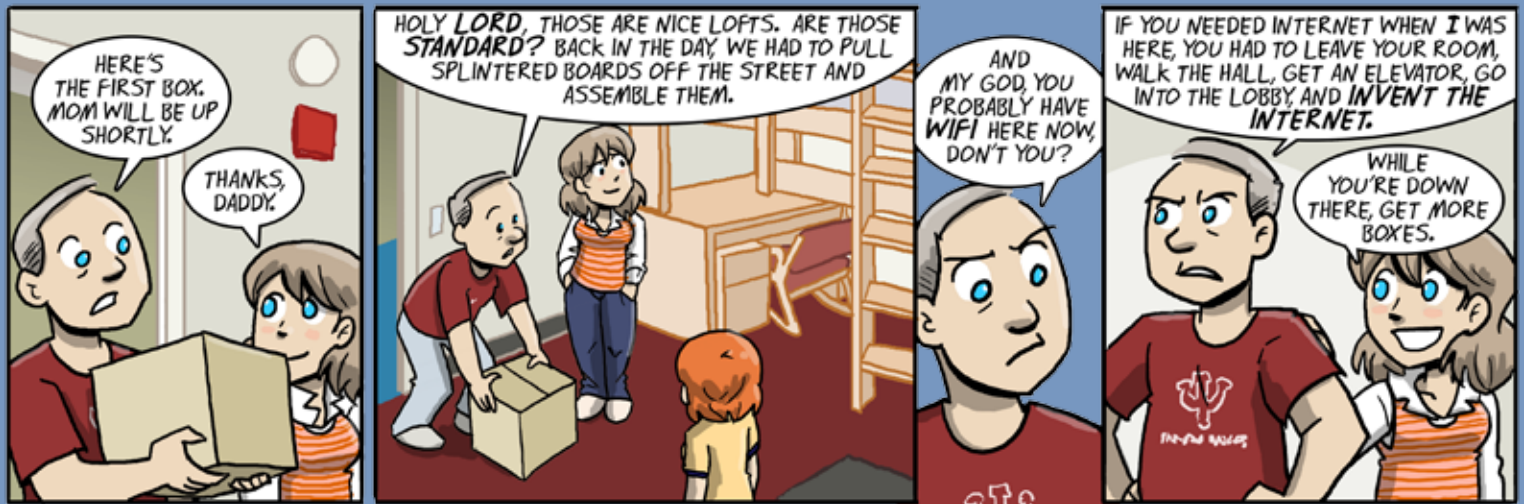
If there's a hand-drawn doodle on this page, it means you either bought yourself the coveted, limited *Dumbing of Age Extra* version of this book, you came to see me at a convention, or I just think you're sexy.

MOVE-IN DAY

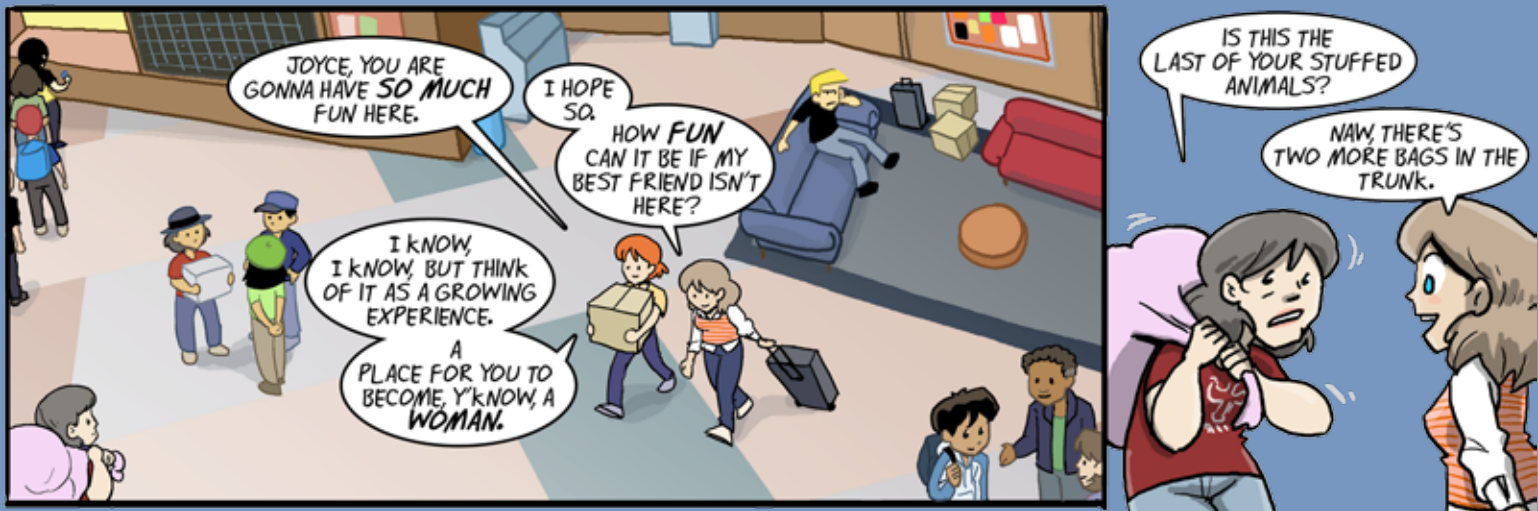
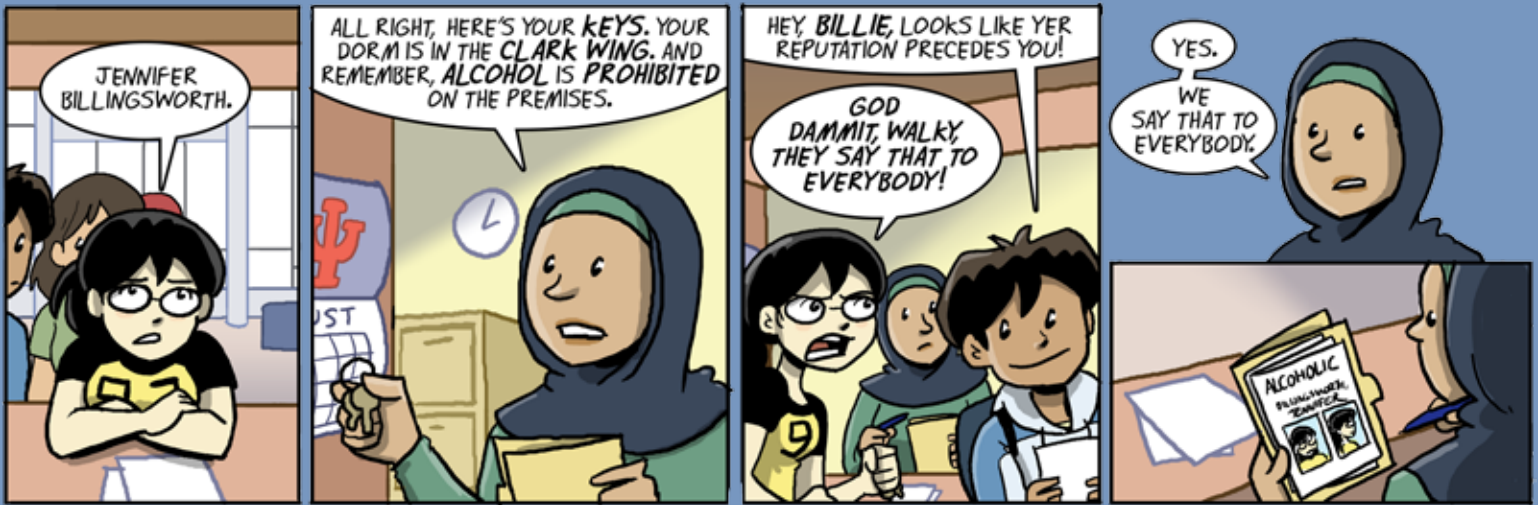





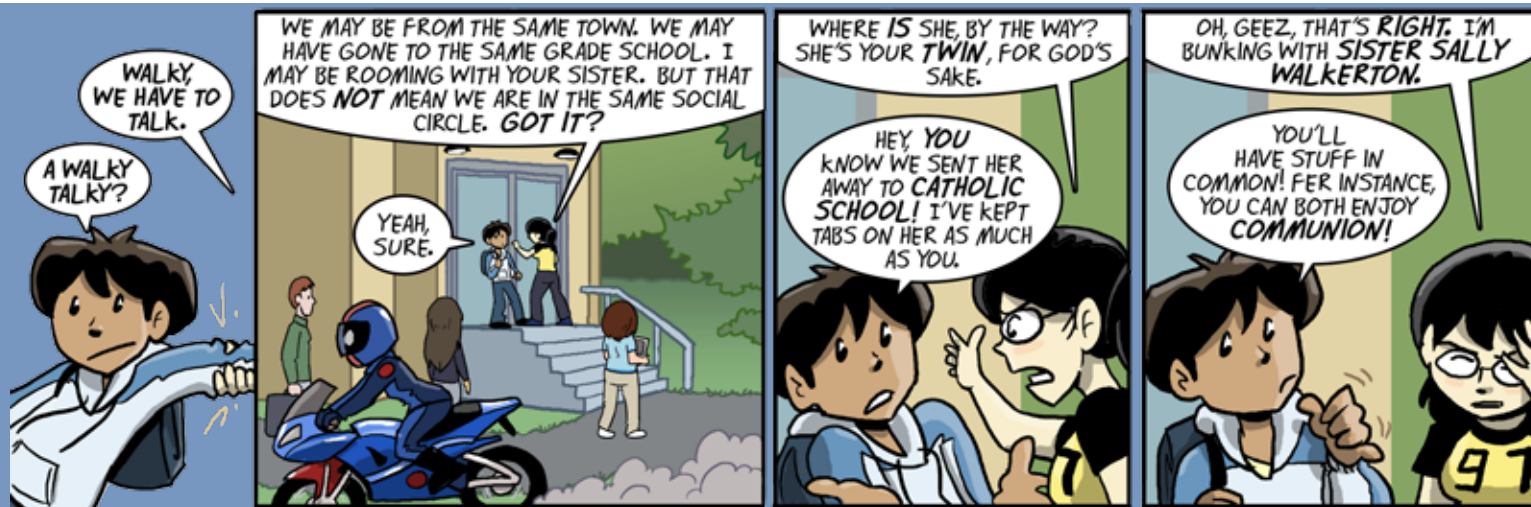
If there's anything I've learned from my webcomics peers over the years, it's that girls like poop jokes, too. Why not start out with one.



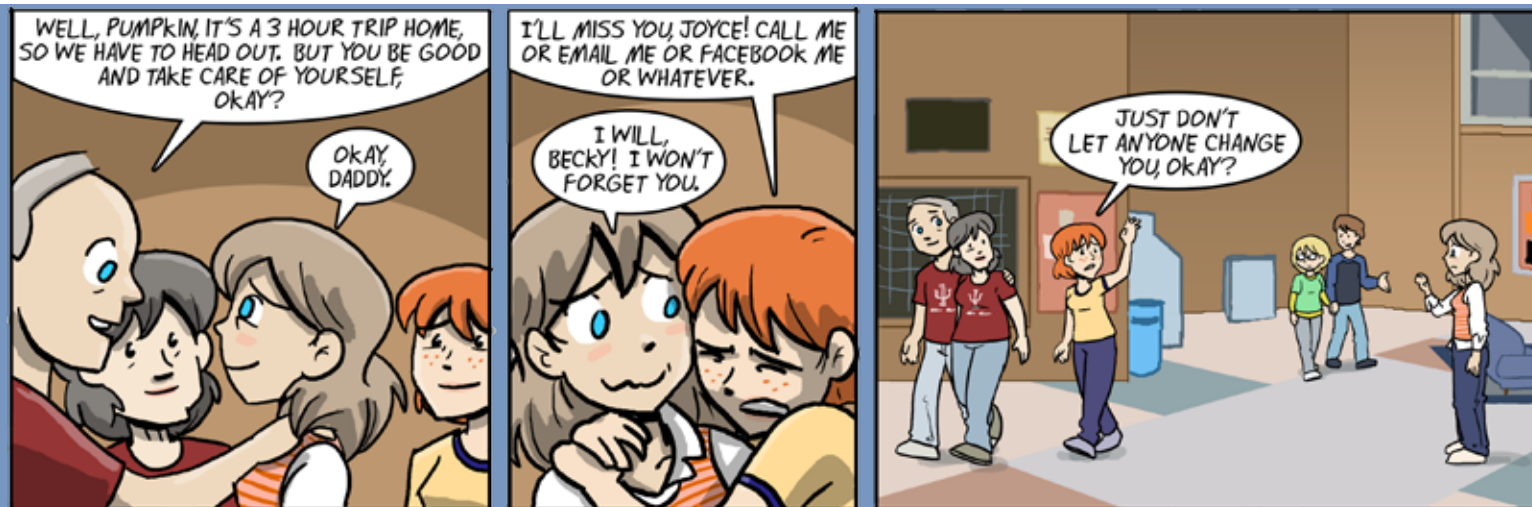
I'd really like to take this moment to thank the Indiana University website for their 3D rotational views of their dorm rooms.



 You get to see Dina's parents and Walky's parents here briefly. Billie's parents aren't here, as the Walkertons brought her. Billie's parents are pretty hands-off.



I'd be happy to never draw a background again, but I pushed myself to always include them in *Dumbing of Age*. I wanted this to feel like a real place these characters are occupying.



(Of course, this *is* a real place, since it's Indiana University, and the backgrounds are created from reference photos, but you know what I mean.)

JOYCE BROWN

Hometown: La Porte, Indiana

Major: Elementary Education

Likes: Jesus Christ, One Direction, sparkly vampires, keeping foods separate on her plate

Joyce was raised and homeschooled in smalltown Indiana by her parents and her three older brothers. The world would call her naive or childish or smallminded, but Joyce will surprise everyone with her singleminded cheerfulness, optimism, and (most importantly) perseverance.

She'll need these qualities more than ever now that she's at a large university, spending all of her days with people outside her family and friends for the first time! It could be a scary time of radical adjustment for Joyce, but she's too determined to find the good in people to let things get to her.



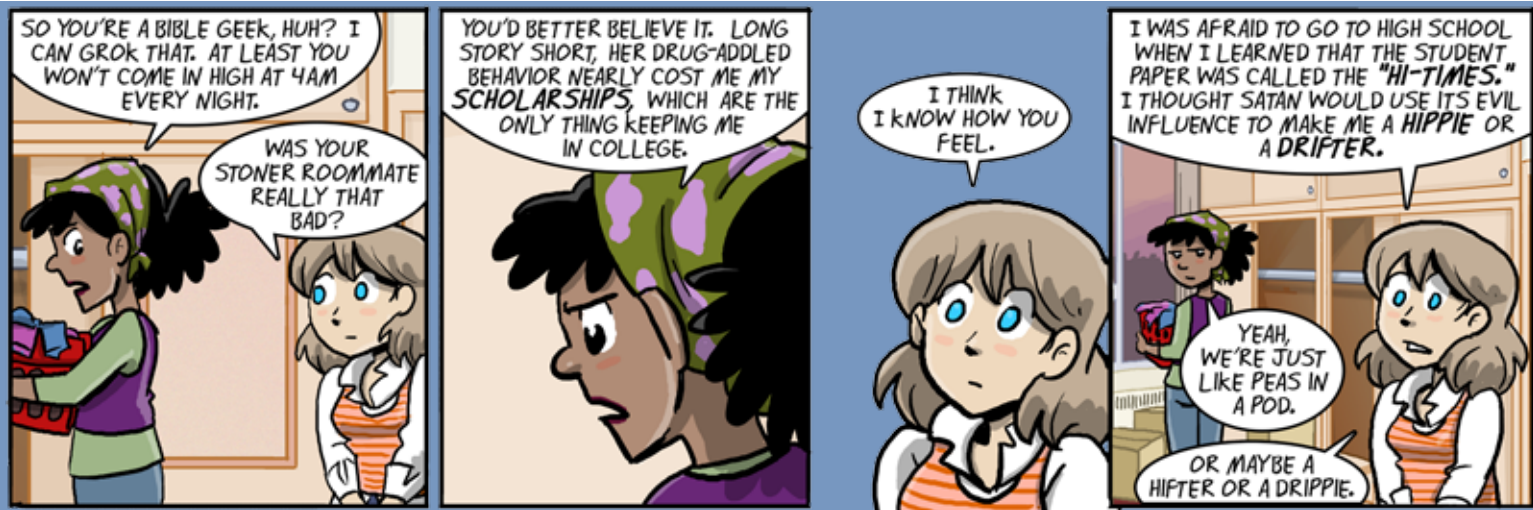


Placing these characters in three-dimensional space allows me to tell stories in both the foreground and background. Joyce standing alone in her thoughts would have made for a boring strip, but I got that moment while focusing on something else.



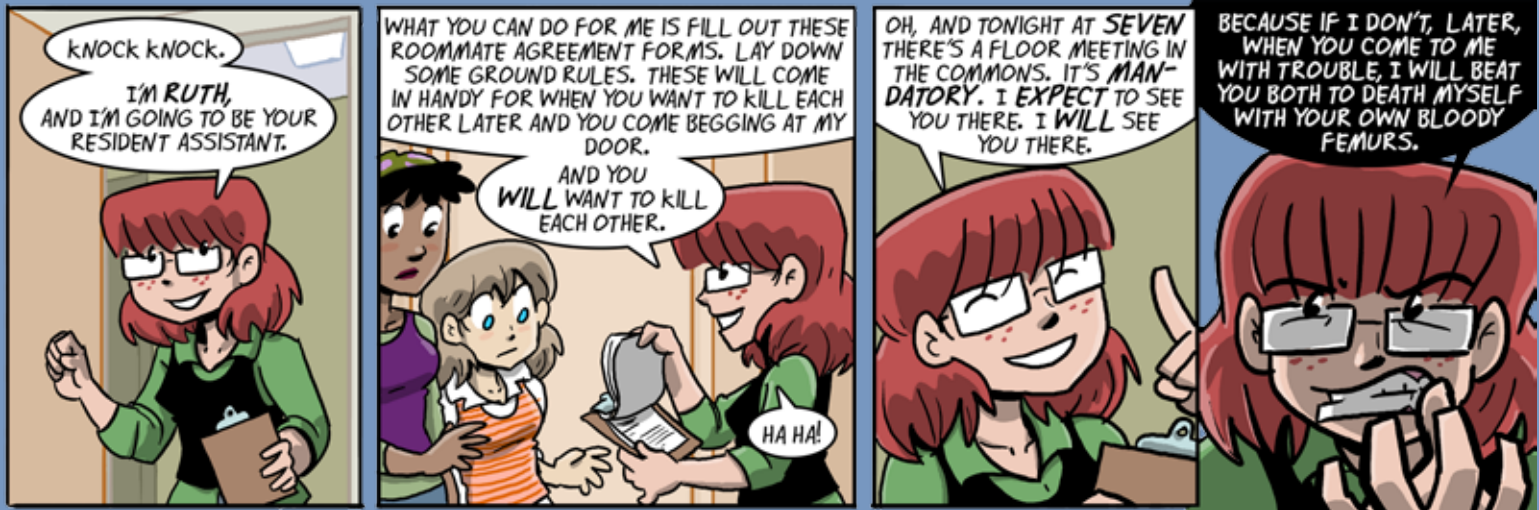


I kind of wanted to rapid-fire introduce everybody at the beginning. Nine strips in, and we've got seven of our major players (and Becky) accounted for.

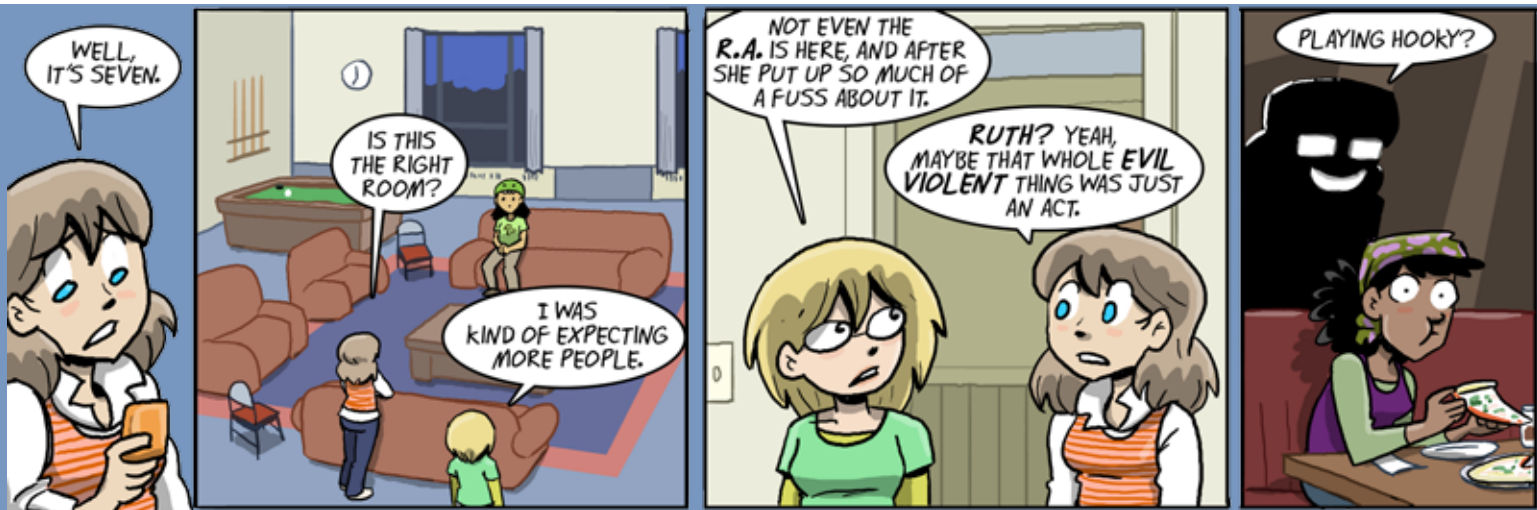
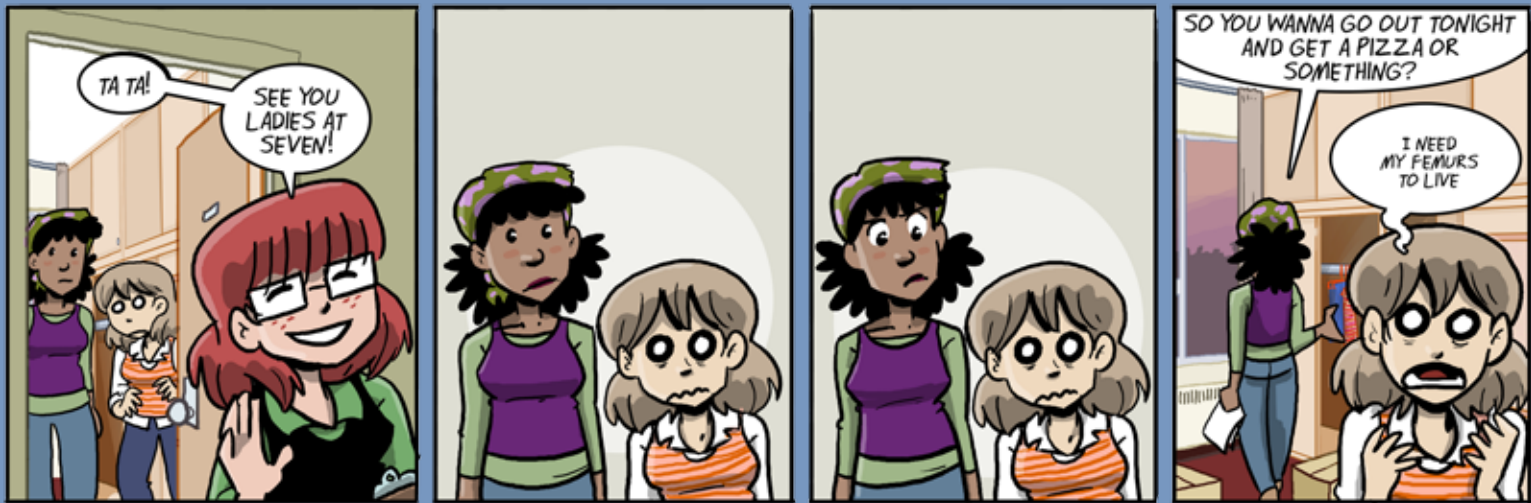




I think the photo of young Becky and Joyce is of them at Indiana Beach.



Ruth surprised me. I didn't expect her to run in this direction, but she did, and practically immediately.

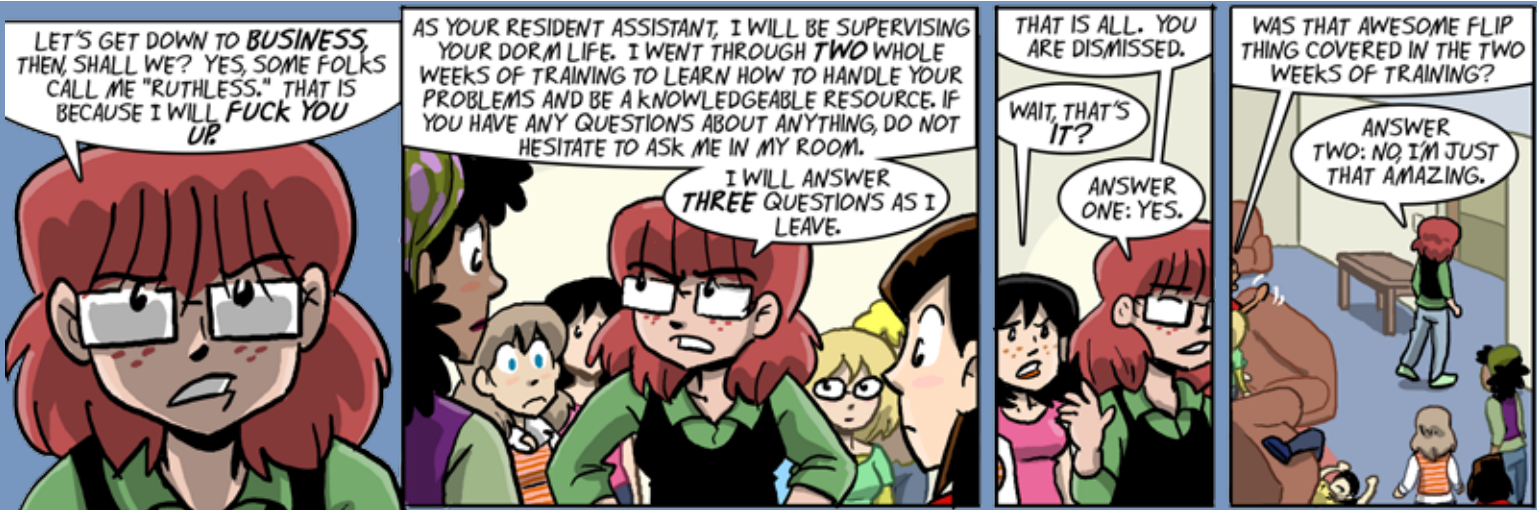


That's the usual attendance for a floor meeting, if I recall. But Ruth has other ideas.





I love action sequences, so this was fun to draw. Keeping spacial dynamics consistent from background to background was a challenge.



RUTH LESSICK

Hometown: Kaladar, Ontario

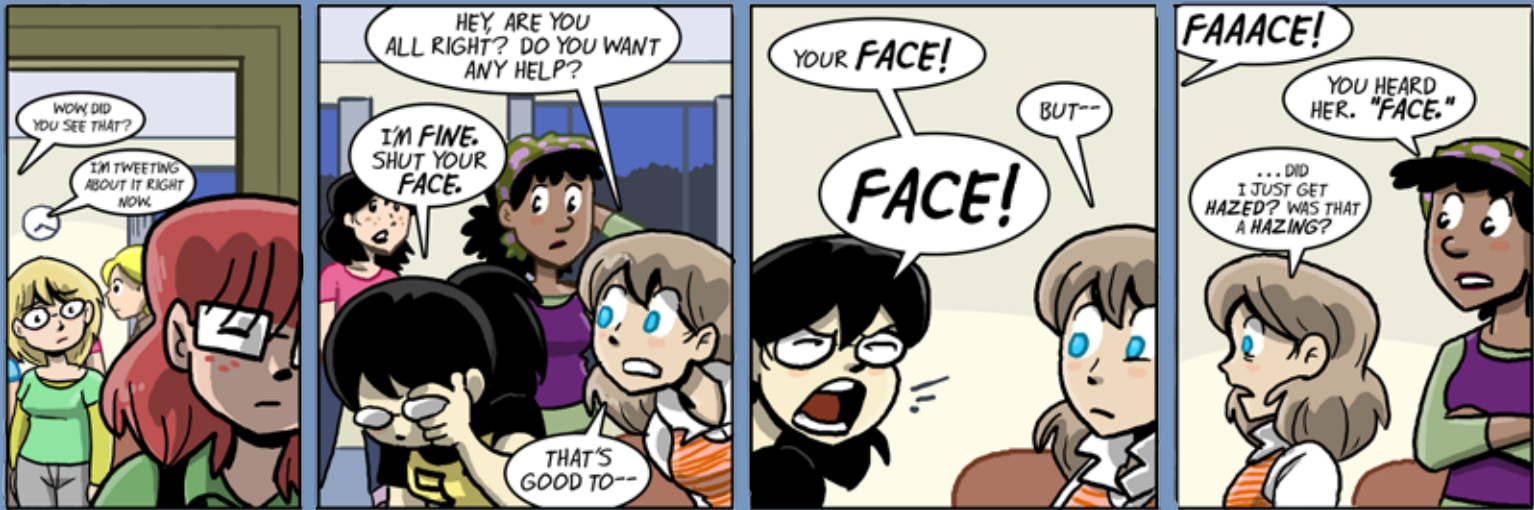
Major: English

Likes: Unnecessary bloodshed, Toronto Maple Leafs, femurs (allegedly)

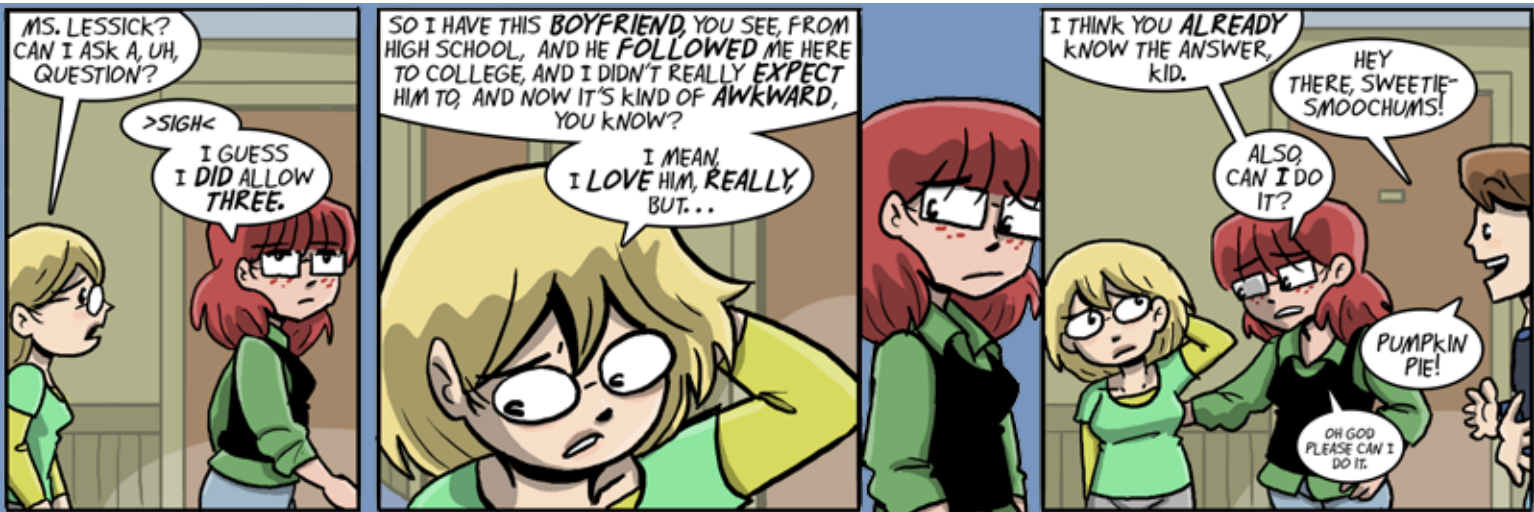
Judging by her administrative style, most students living on the third floor of the Clark wing assume Ruth's major is in Cruelty or maybe Throat Punching. If and/or when the English thing doesn't pan out, she probably has a bright future as a prison warden.

Ruth Lessick has earned the nickname "Ruthless," which is as amusingly convenient as it is appropriate. It brings to mind botonists named "Mr. Plantz" or hairdressers named "Ms. Barber." Did the name bring them down that path, or was it just coincidence? Why is Ruth the way she is? Is it just the name, is it happenstance, or is it something more?





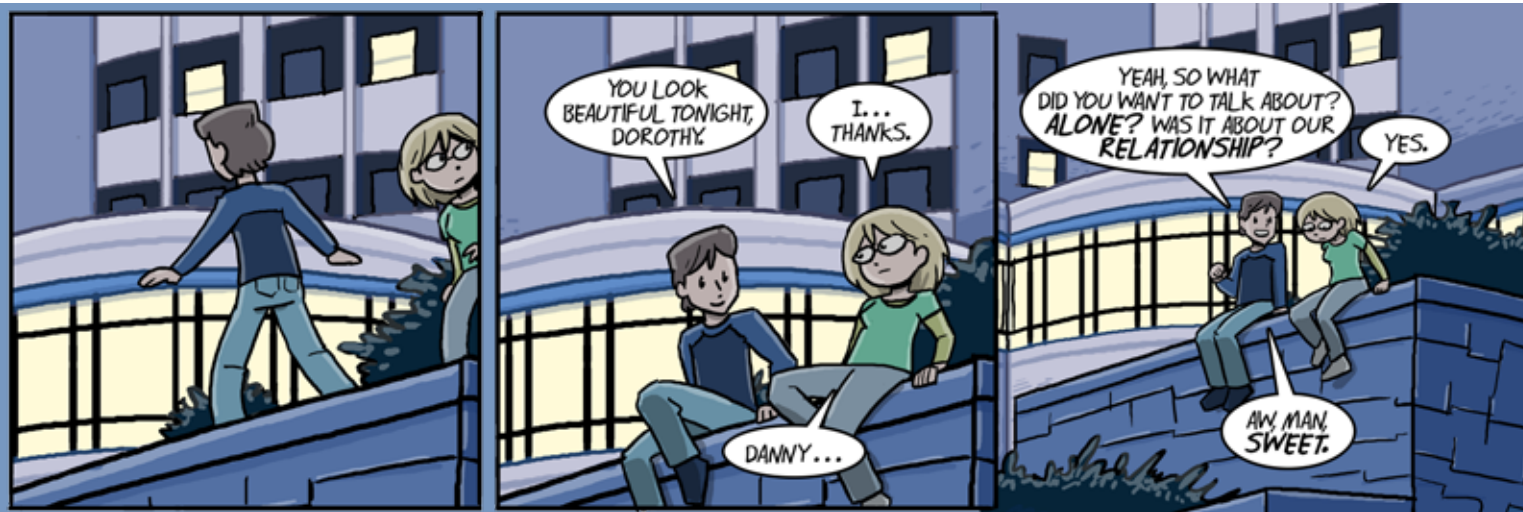
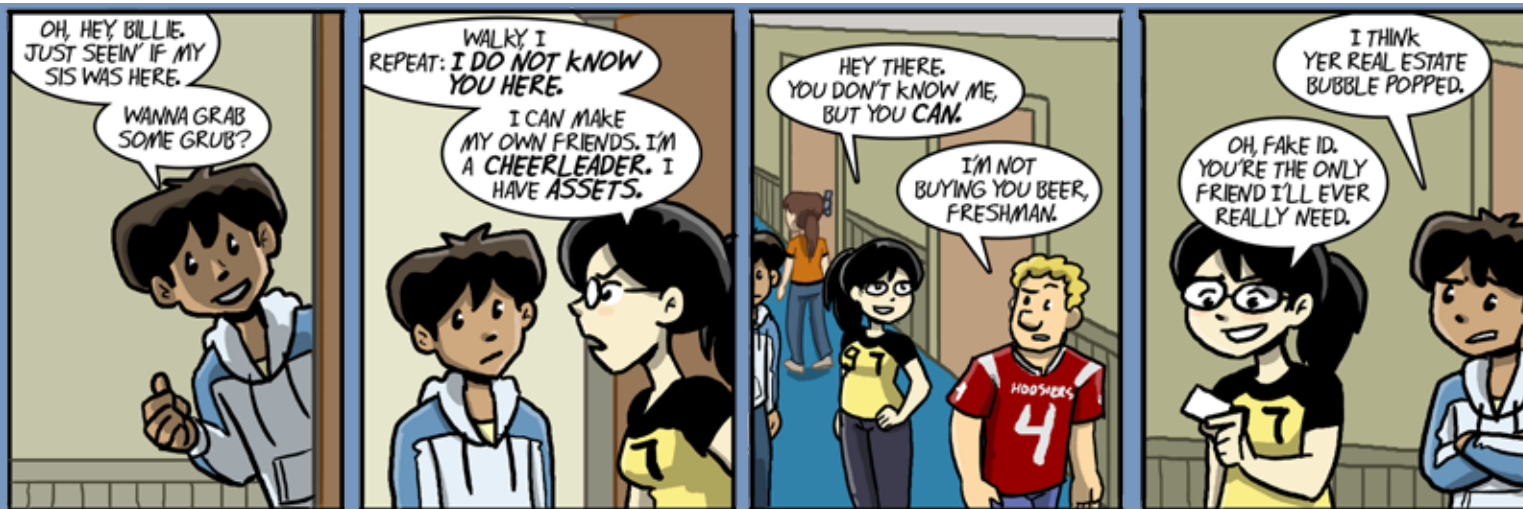
"FAAAAAAAAAACE" became a meme in the comments section of the *Dumbing of Age* website. For better or for worse.



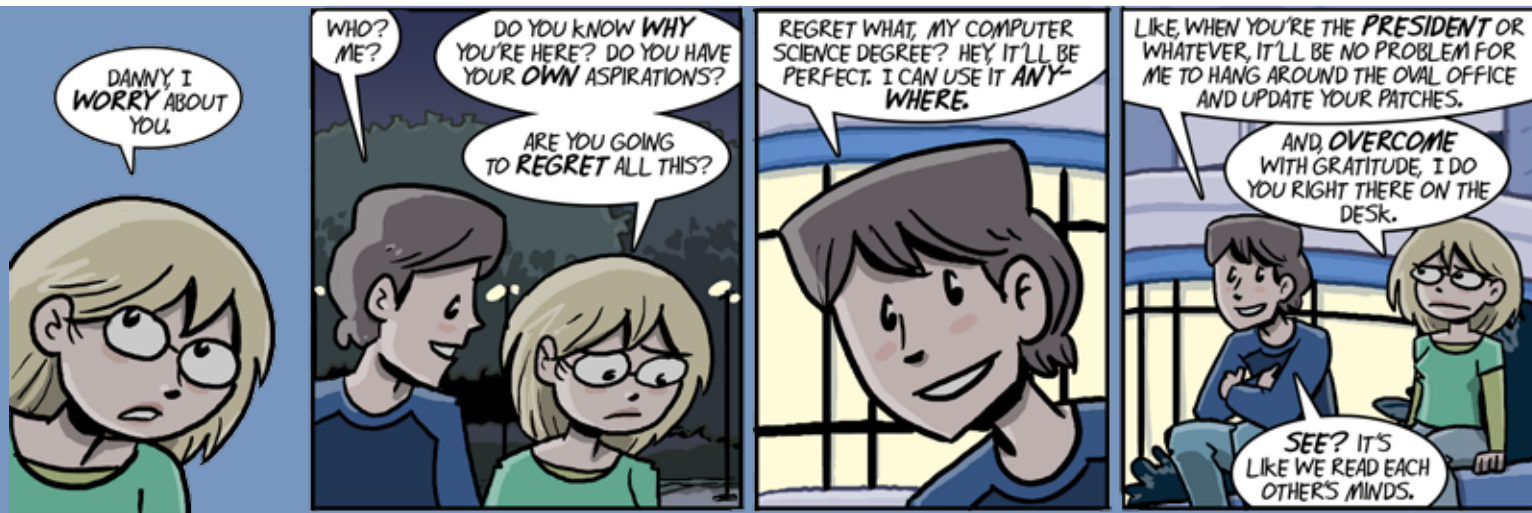
I thought it was important to show that Ruth has a softer side fairly early on, despite her nuclear approach to discipline.



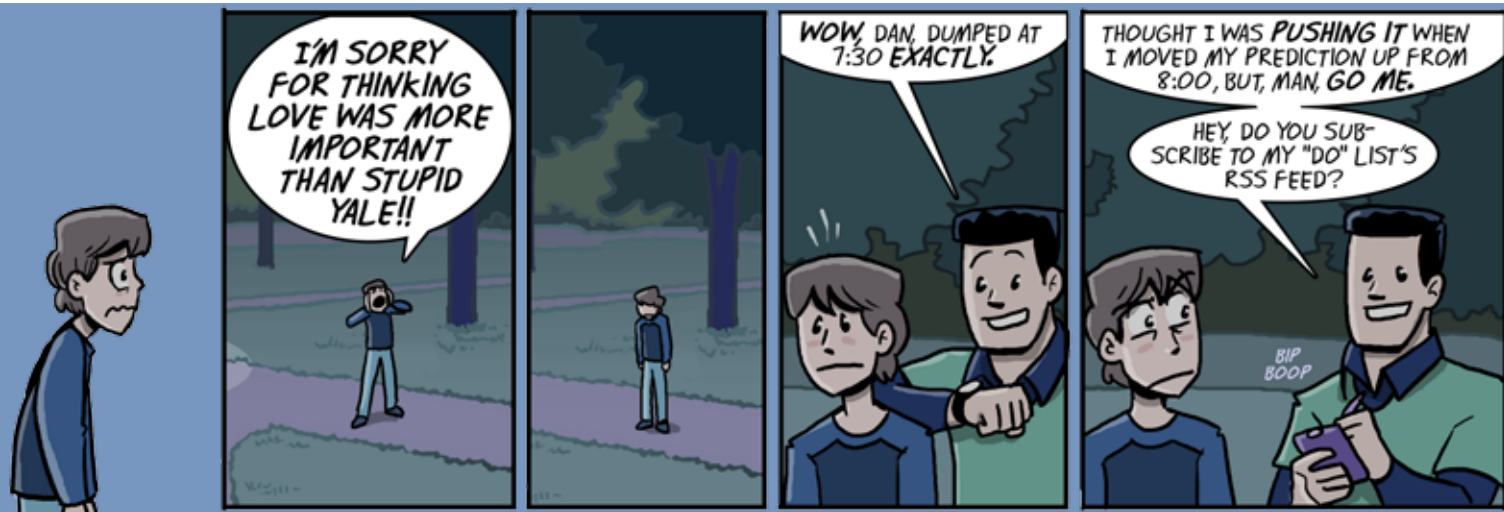
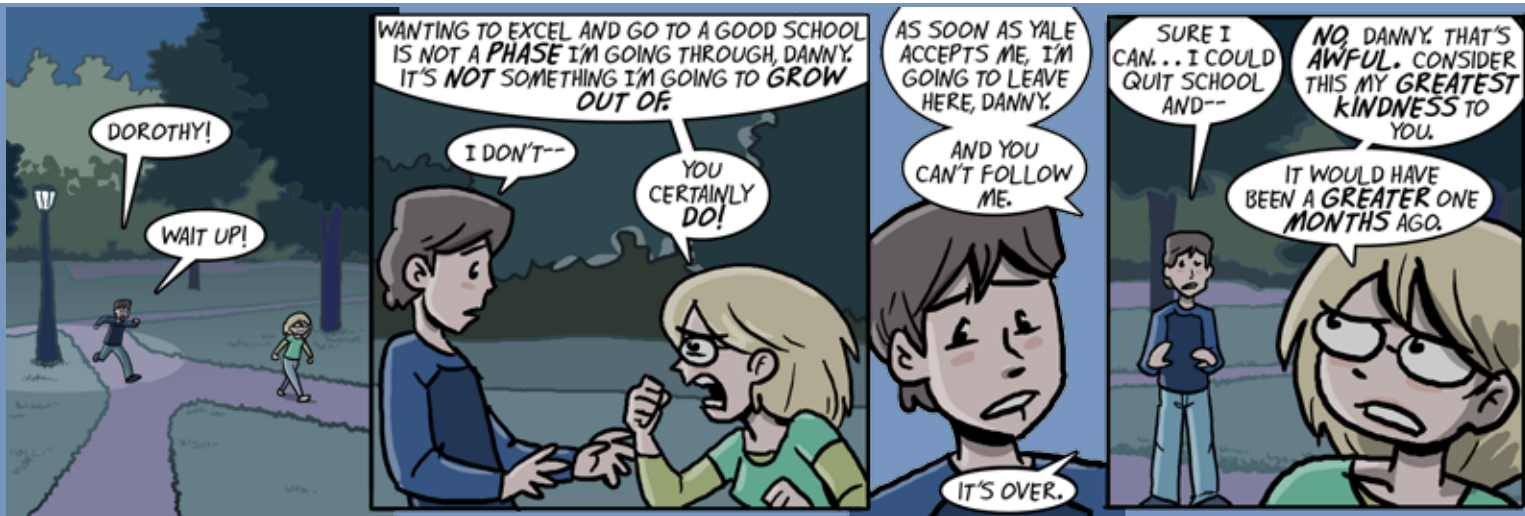
Sal's Catholic school girl outfits are cribbed from Josh Phillips's *Avalon* webcomic (avalonhigh.com). I still carry a torch for that aborted series.



I knew this specific location existed, but it took for-damn-ever to suss out an image of it on Google. Well worth it.



Speaking of Google, there are way fewer famous titles of things that started with "Through" than I had hoped.



I've toyed with the idea of creating a "real" Joe's Do List online, but I really have too much stuff to do already.

DOROTHY KEENER

Hometown: Mishawaka, Indiana

Major: Law

Likes: Progress, learning, introspection, Saturday morning cartoons

Dorothy has one goal on her mind: achieve greatness. She may just be at some stupid midwestern state college, but if she focuses on her studies and gets the right scholarships and makes the right connections, she'll be out of here and into Yale before too long. No distractions, Dorothy! No distractions!

She plans to be the first female and atheist President of the United States. To be frank, she'd feel perfectly complacent about being the second or third, but she doesn't rate the chances of that actually happening. Nope, it'll probably have to be her.



LET'S SEE. DOROTHY'S GOT A RESPECTABLE RACK, BUT COULD USE MORE BOOTY. KINDA BOOKISH. I'LL FILE HER WITH THE SEVENS.



OKAY FINE, SHE'S AN EIGHT, IF YOU'RE GONNA GET PISSY ABOUT IT.



HEY, LOOK AT THIS! SOME GAY LITTLE FRESHMAN MISSES HIS MOMMY.



M-MY GIRLFRIEND BROKE UP WITH ME.

SHE GAY-BROKE UP WITH YOUR GAY-FACE, GAYWAD.

>GRUNT<

P-PLEASE STOP TALKING AND JUST BEAT ME UP ALREADY.



Jocks don't really walk around campus at night beating up people, but crime bosses also don't dress up like clowns and flood the water supply with laughing gas.



I played with my readers' expectations and gave Amazi-Girl a silhouette that resembled a more likely character, given Danny's history in my older strips.

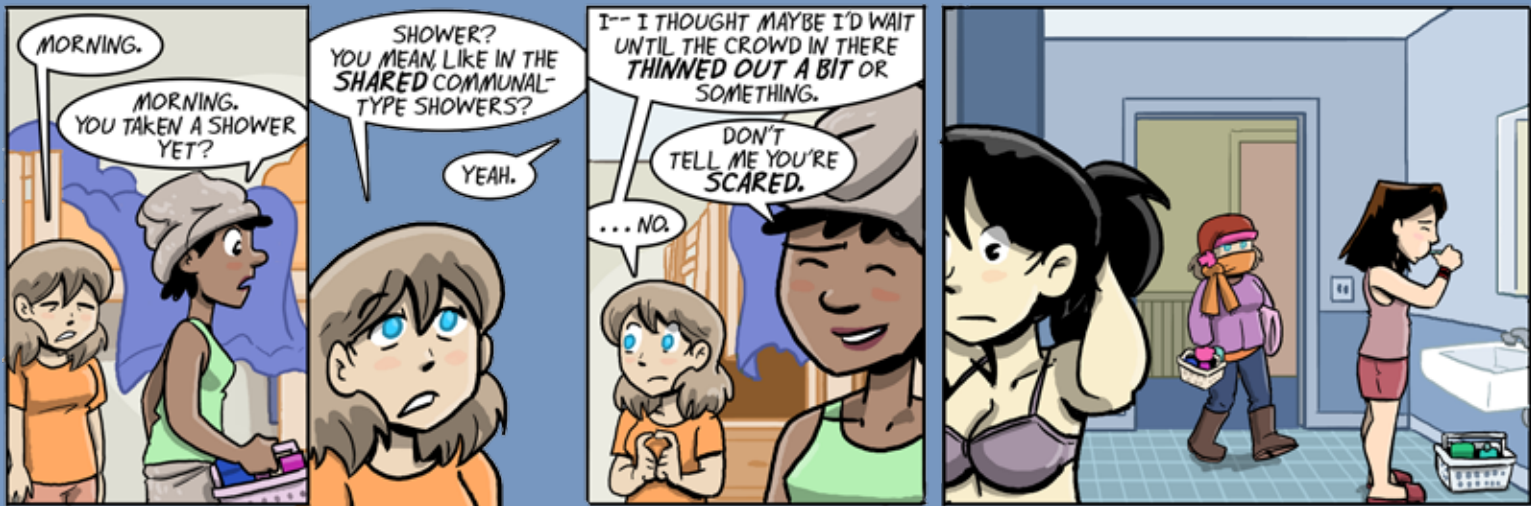


This strip and the previous one were expanded from an earlier, abridged version. I thought the scene needed more room for more beats. The original, unpublished version is below.

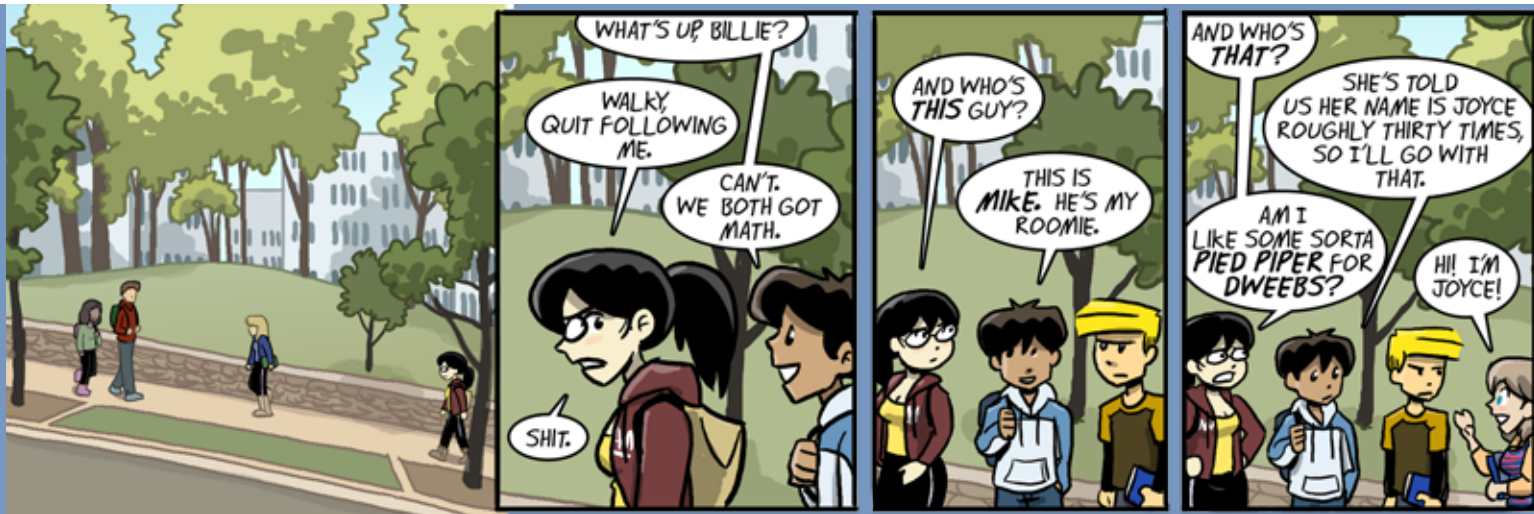


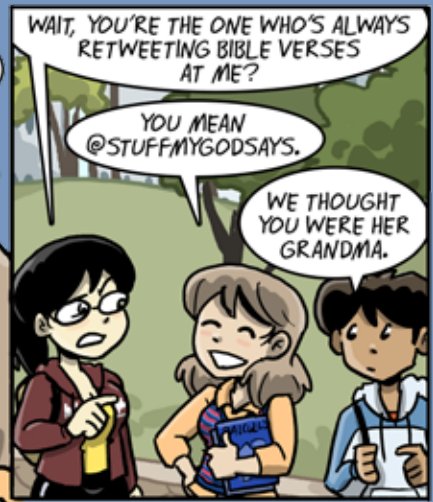
UP-HILL FROM HERE



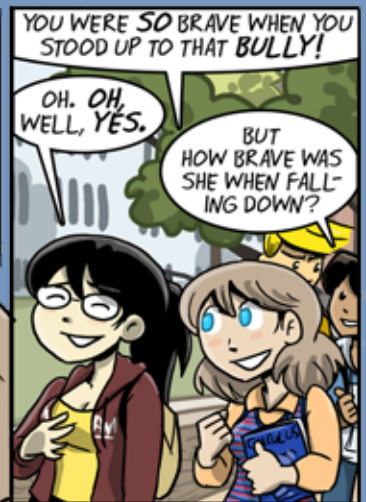
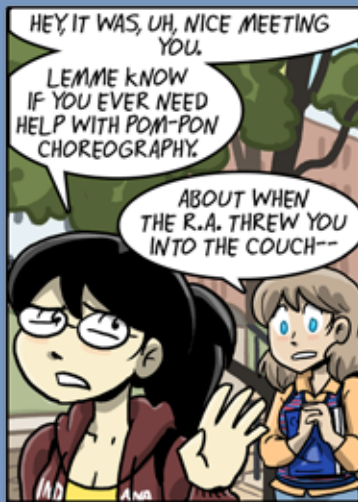


I drew this strip way ahead of most of ones that precede it because I needed a stand-alone strip to feature on the *Dumbing of Age* bookmarks I pass out at conventions.





The @Billie_B97 and @Joyce_Brown Twitter feeds exist.



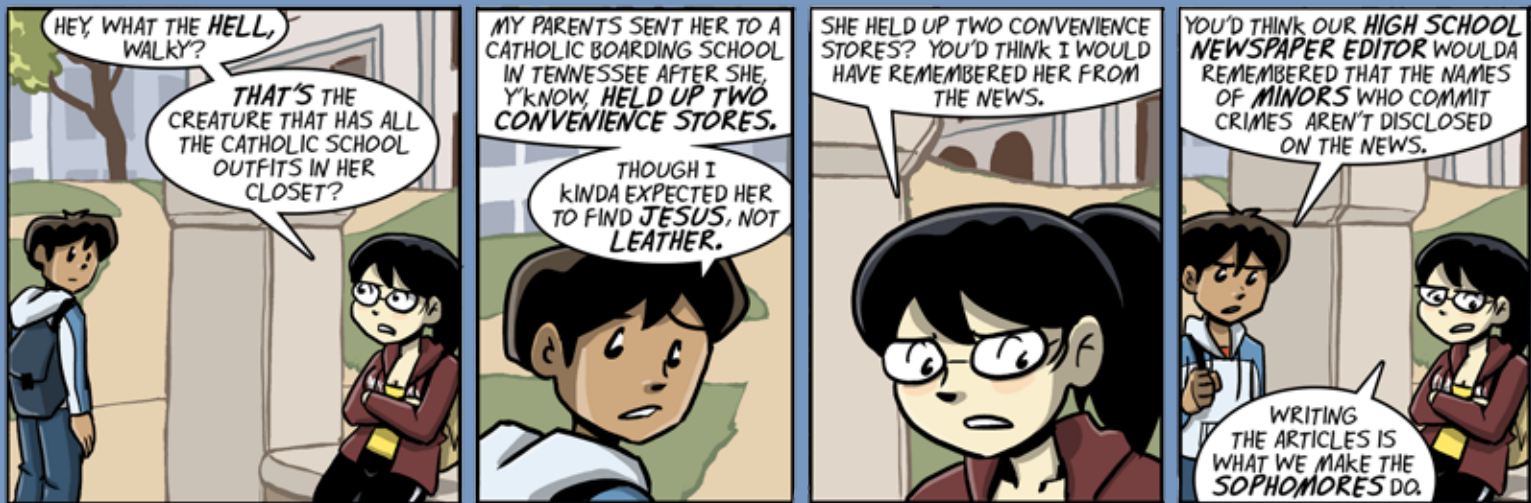


Look! It's the motorcyclist from the fifth strip where Walky says he doesn't know where his sister is! I'm so clever.

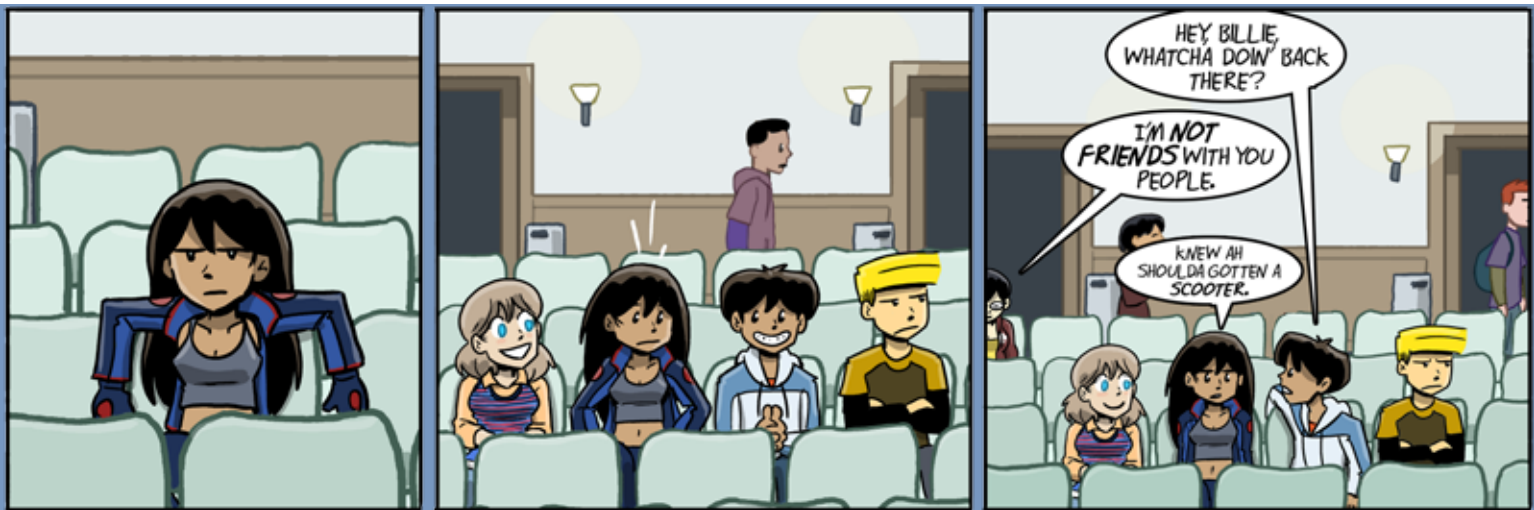


Believe it or not: There is fan art of Joyce making out with Sal's motorcycle.

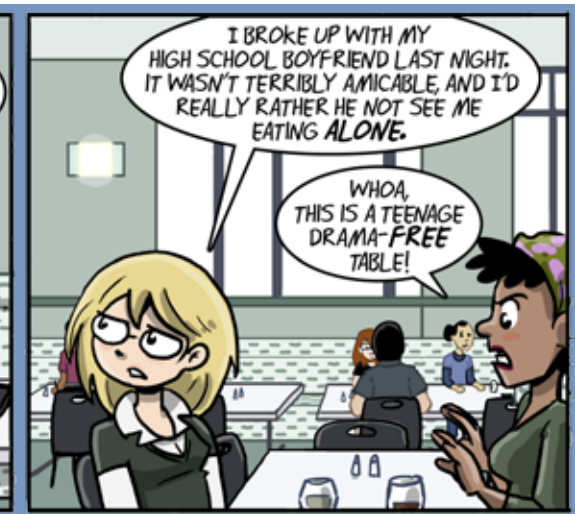




Sophomore students were the earliest year allowed on our high school newspaper staff. Dunno how common that is elsewhere, but it was true for me!



Man, my characters sure do always arrive early enough to class before everyone else gets there, don't they. That's because my characters realize crowds are tough to draw and I have another whole webcomic I have to do.



SARAH CLINTON

Hometown: Fort Wayne, Indiana

Major: Law

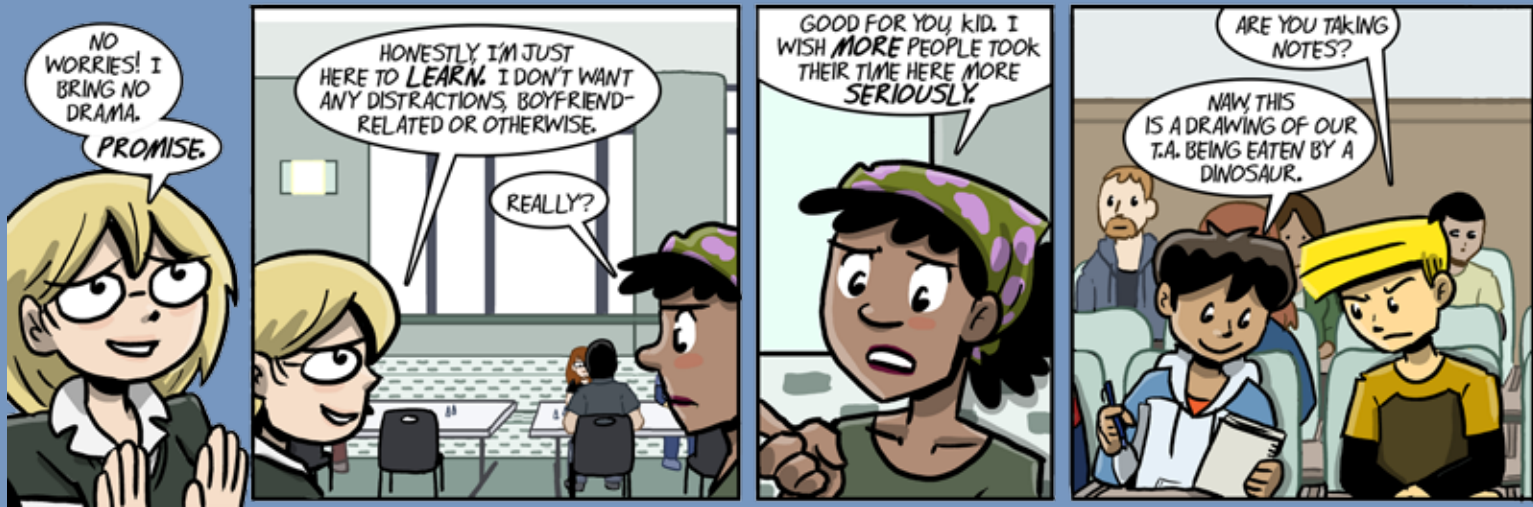
Likes: Meh.

Bitter and jaded, Sarah is a returning sophomore. She just wants everyone to leave her alone so she can study quietly and get into law school.

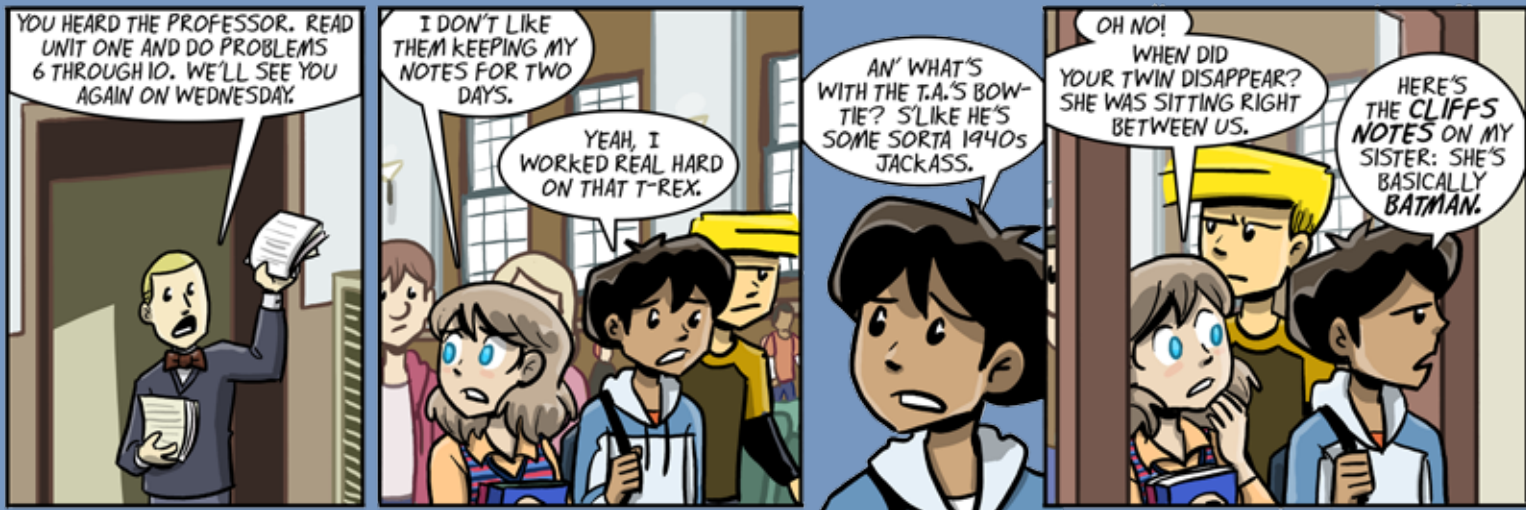
Her roommate last year was anything but conducive to learning. She reluctantly narked that crazy stoner off of campus, and is still reaping the whirlwind of getting rid of a girl who was several orders of magnitude more popular than she. This hasn't improved her outlook on life, no.

Oh, hrm. And her new freshman roommate is an idealist. Well, that's going to be interesting.

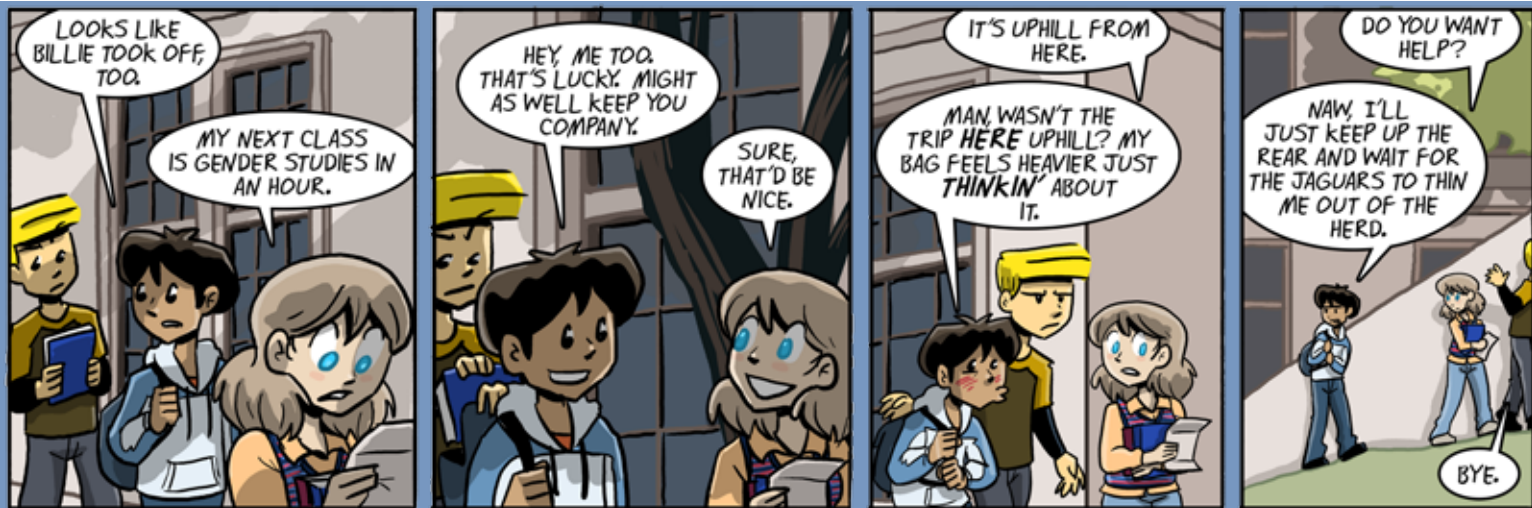


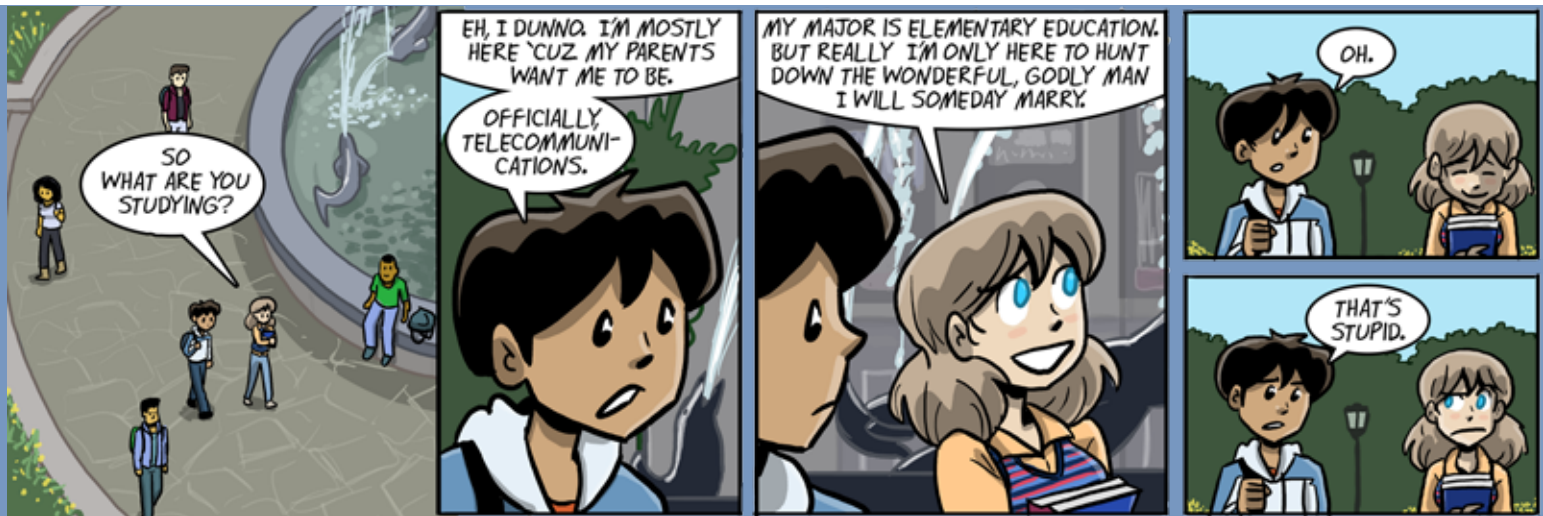


When I was in college, they were crazy strict about attendance and concocted all sorts of extravagant ways to get students to show up. If I missed more than two days of art school, for example, I'd be docked a letter grade.

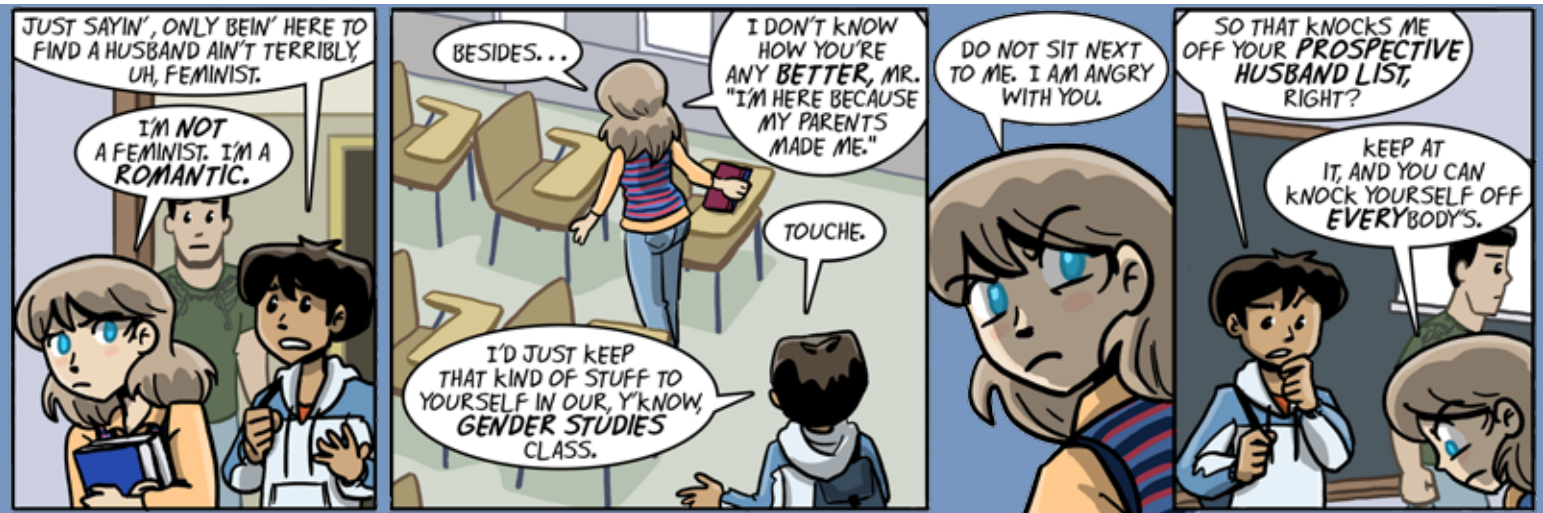


I'm surprised it took me even this long to mention Batman.

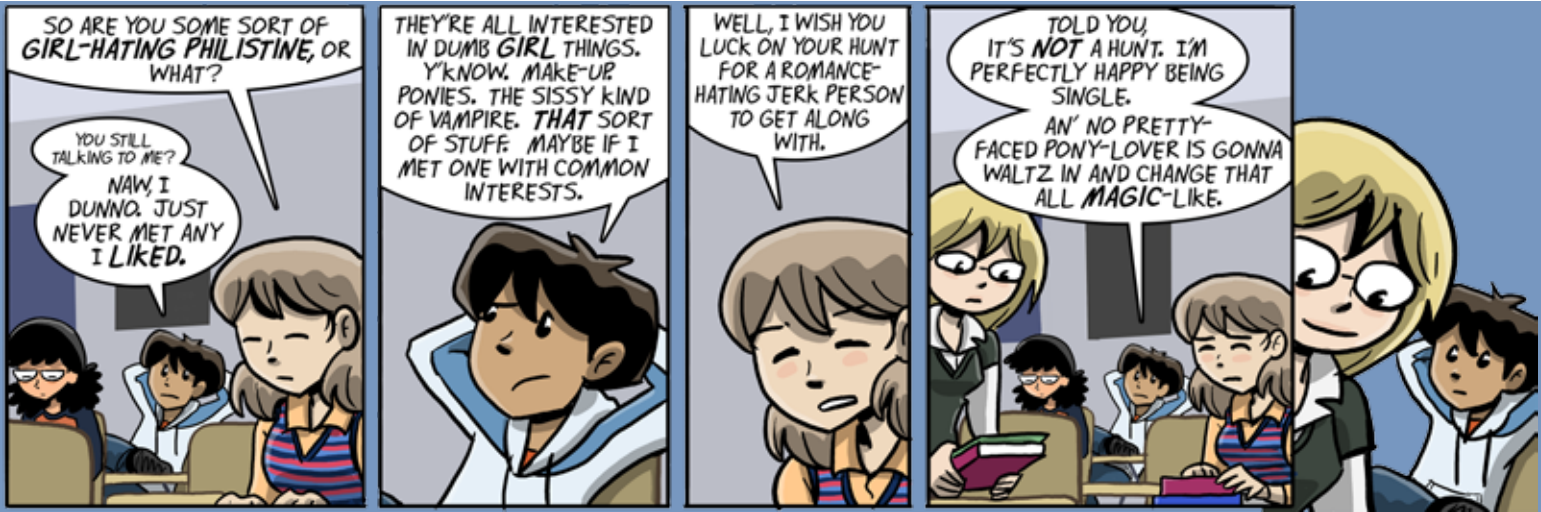




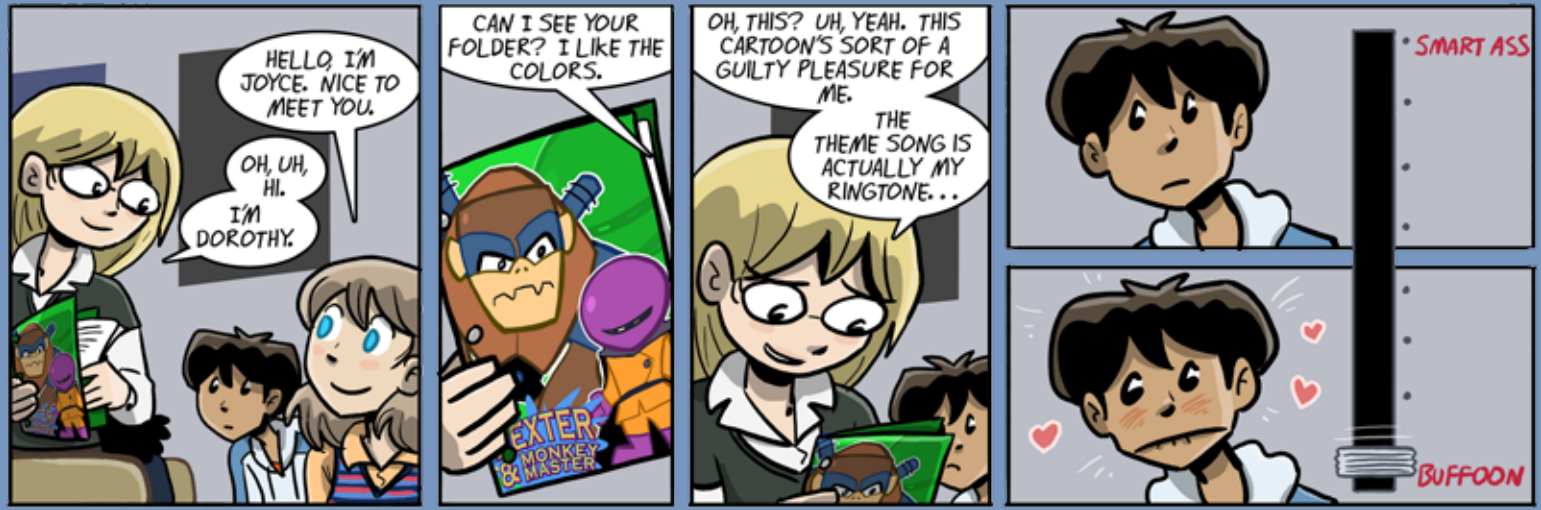
That's Showalter Fountain behind them. The sculpture depicts the birth of Venus. Also there's some spitting fish, I guess.



I inadvertently drew left-handed desks here, which are a rarity, so by the end of this book I'd redrawn them to be right-handed desks. So let's say this is where Indiana University was storing all of its left-handed desks for a day or so.



After speaking that last sentence, the chance of a girl appearing who Walky would fall for is basically 100%.



Those last two panels are perhaps the truest depiction of myself around girls when I was Walky's age.



If Leslie had a character page in this book, it wouldn't need to say anything more than "Leslie is awesome."

SO, WHY ARE WE ALL HERE IN GENDER STUDIES?



IS IT BECAUSE WE'RE HERE TO STUDY THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF MASCULINITIES AND FEMININITIES?



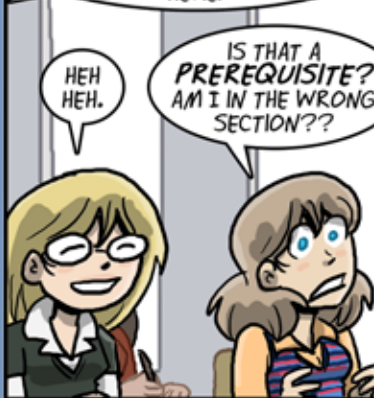
IS IT BECAUSE THIS IS AN EASY ENGLISH CREDIT?



IS IT BECAUSE YOUR CLASSMATES ARE GOING TO BE MOSTLY FEMALE?



WELL, IF IT'S THE *LAST* ONE, THEN YOU'RE BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE. WE'RE ALL *LESBIANS* HERE.



HEH HEH.

IS THAT A *PREREQUISITE*? AM I IN THE WRONG SECTION??



AMBER?

ONE SECOND. KILLING SPIDERS.



I THOUGHT YOU COULD JOIN MIKE AND I FOR LUNCH DOWN IN THE DINING HALL.

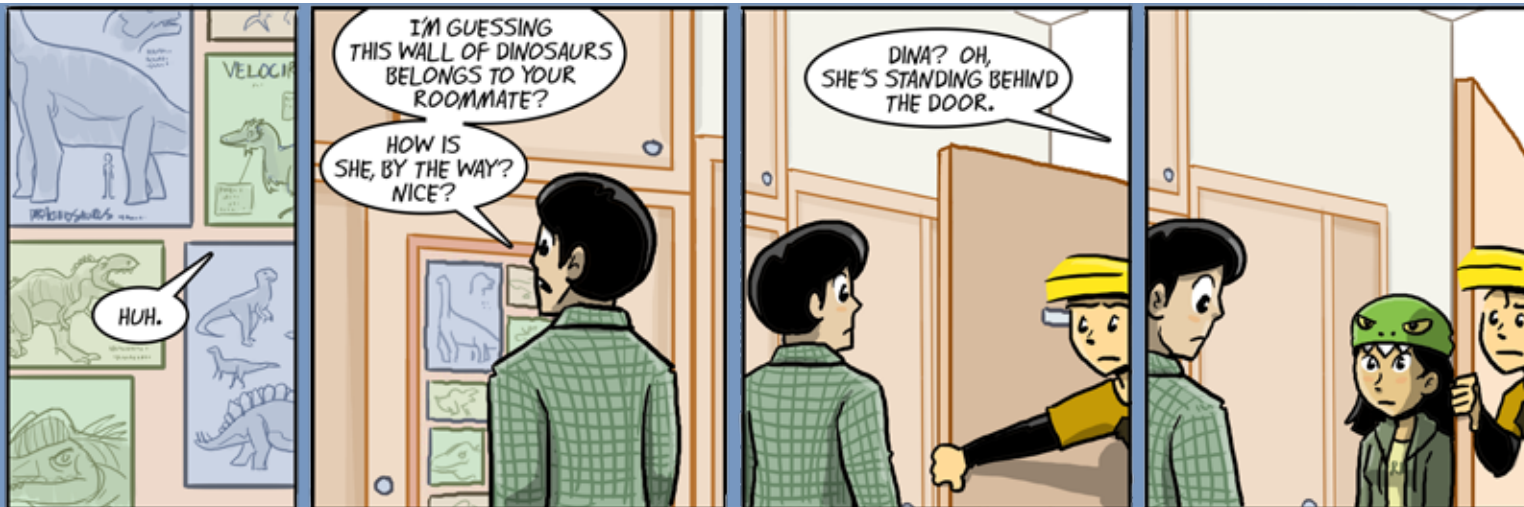


ONE SECOND. KILLING SPIDERS.



OKAY *THIS* TIME, I'M PUTTING MY FOOT DOWN. WE *ONLY* ASK HER, LIKE, *TEN* MORE TIMES, THEN WE FORCE HER OUT OF THE CHAIR.

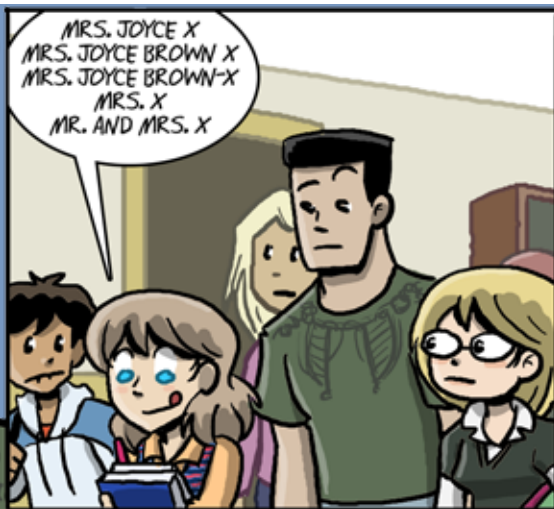
I BROUGHT THE CROWBAR.



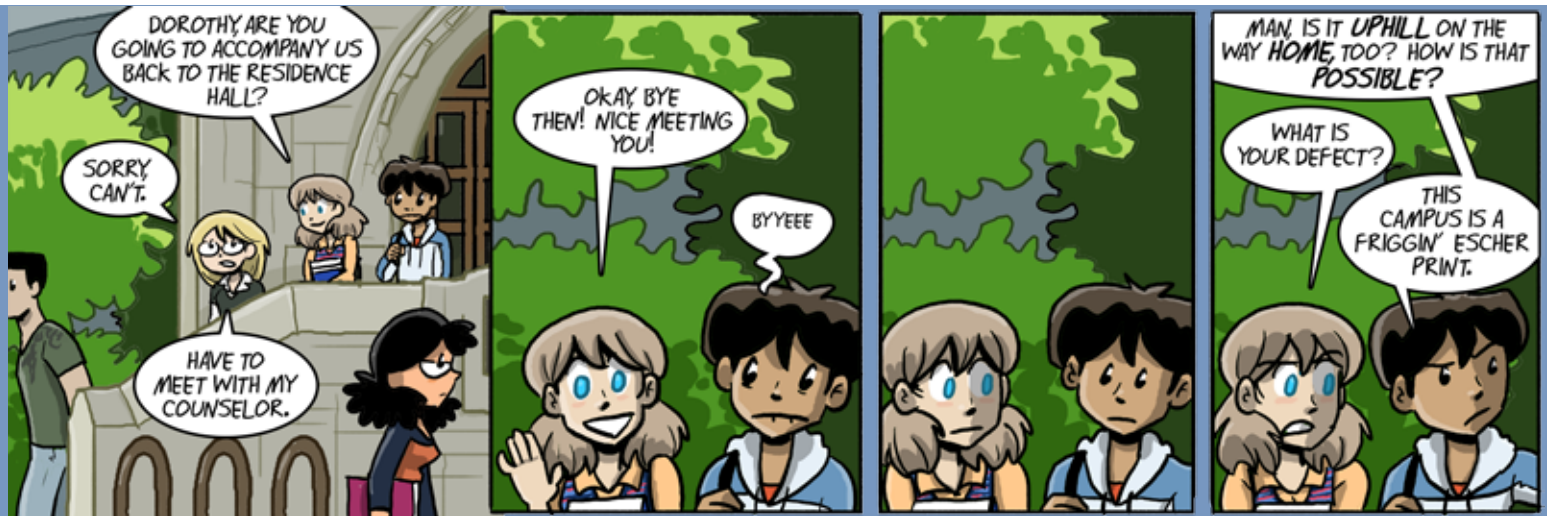
Hi, Dina!



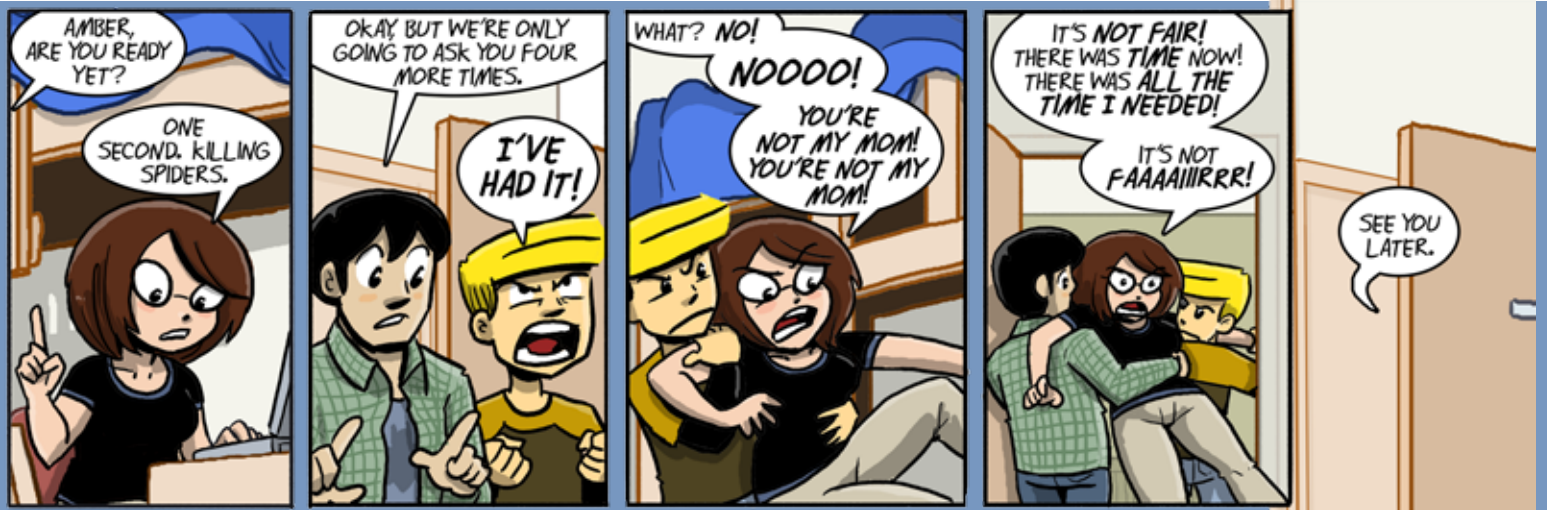
Bye, Dina!



Most folks wait until they have a target last name to play around with. Joyce is too on the ball for that.



It was important to me to establish that even though Walky's this little smart-ass goofball who devolves into a doofus around Dorothy, he's also smart enough to know stuff like who M.C. Escher is.

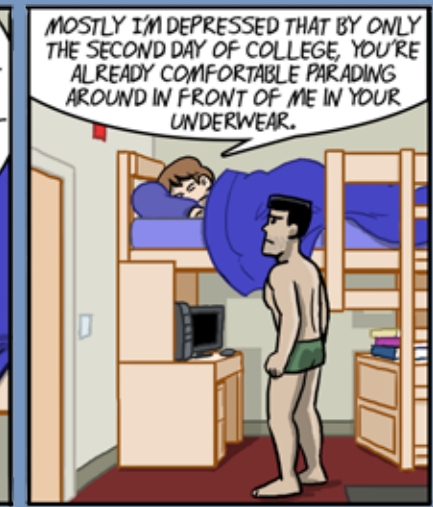


See you later, Dina!

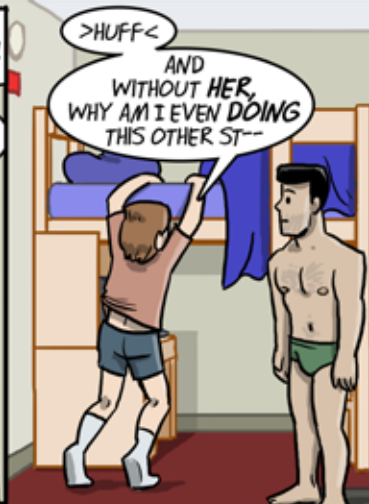


**MEN ARE FROM BECK,
WOMEN ARE FROM CLARK**





I try to be equal-opportunity with my half-dressed people. You got some chicks in bras a few pages ago, so have some Joe in his undies.





Personally, I had somehow avoided this visual information until very recently, when my wife and I were invited to an interesting theater production. I'd say it was the gayest theater thing I'd ever attended, but I've seen *The Lion King* with a dude.



DAVID WALKERTON

Hometown: Evansville, Indiana

Major: Telecommunications

Likes: Cartoons, fast food, doing jack-shit

Walky doesn't know why exactly he's in college, except that his parents really want him there. He'd rather watch cartoons. Apparently you can't major in that? "Telecommunications" has "tele" in it, just like "television," right? He likes watching television! So, hey, close enough.

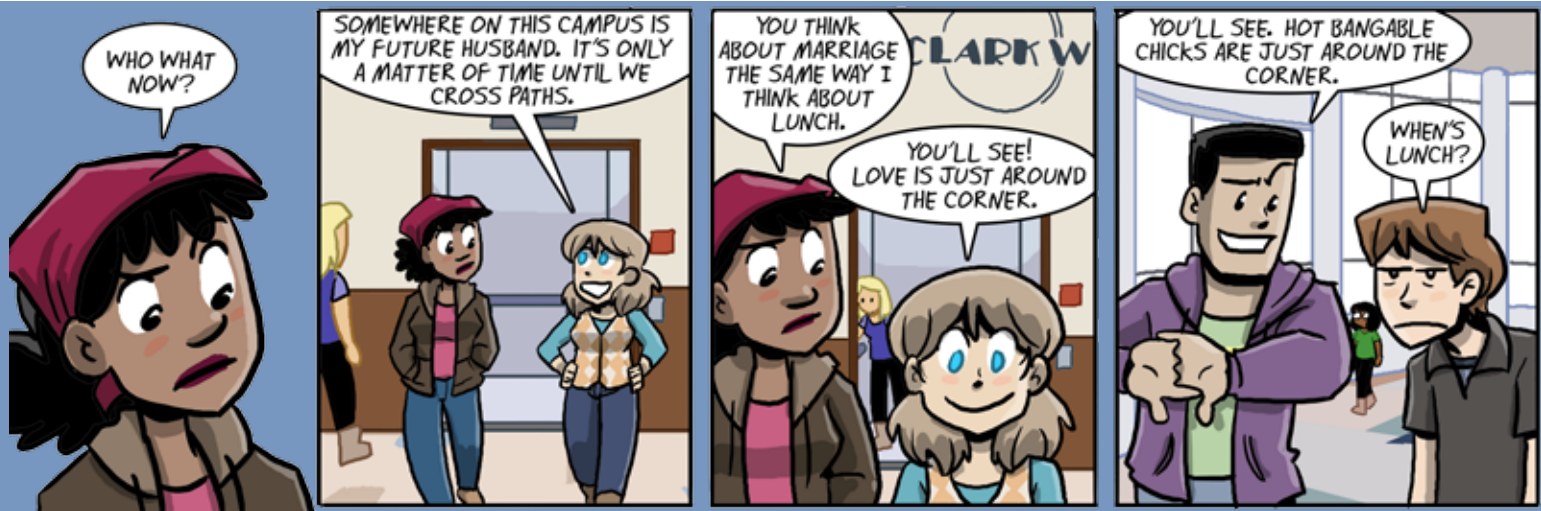
He considers himself the biggest fan of the cartoon "Dexter and Monkey Master," to the point where he owns licensed bed sheets. It's a good thing he plans on being a bachelor forever and ever.

Walky's smart and got excellent grades in high school, but only because he could manage that on auto-pilot without much work. He's terrible at applying himself.

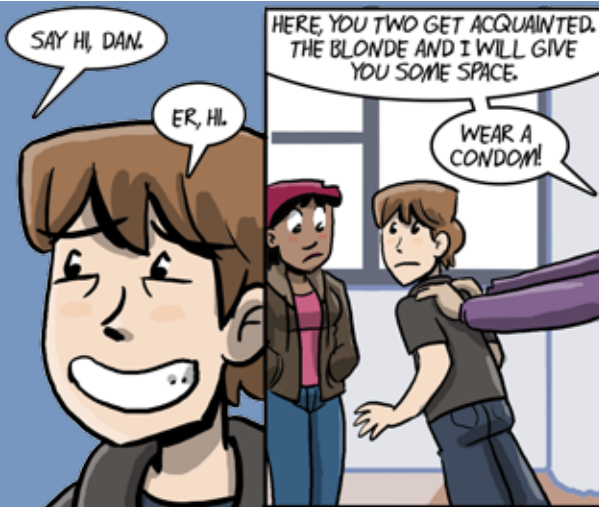
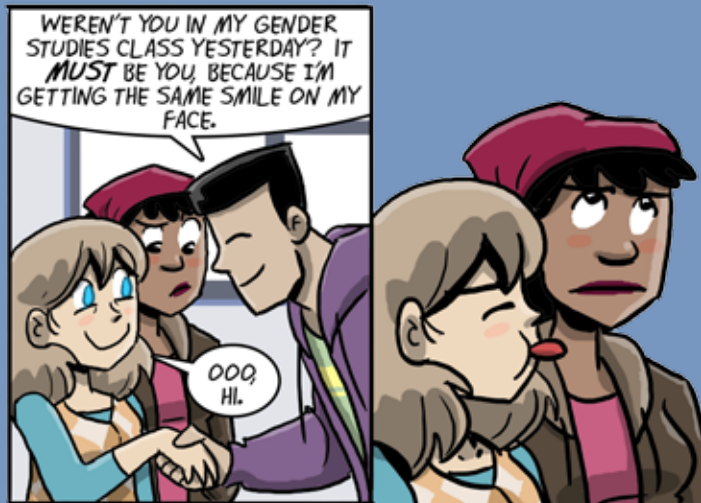
Let's pray he doesn't fall in love with some beautiful, studious over-achiever.

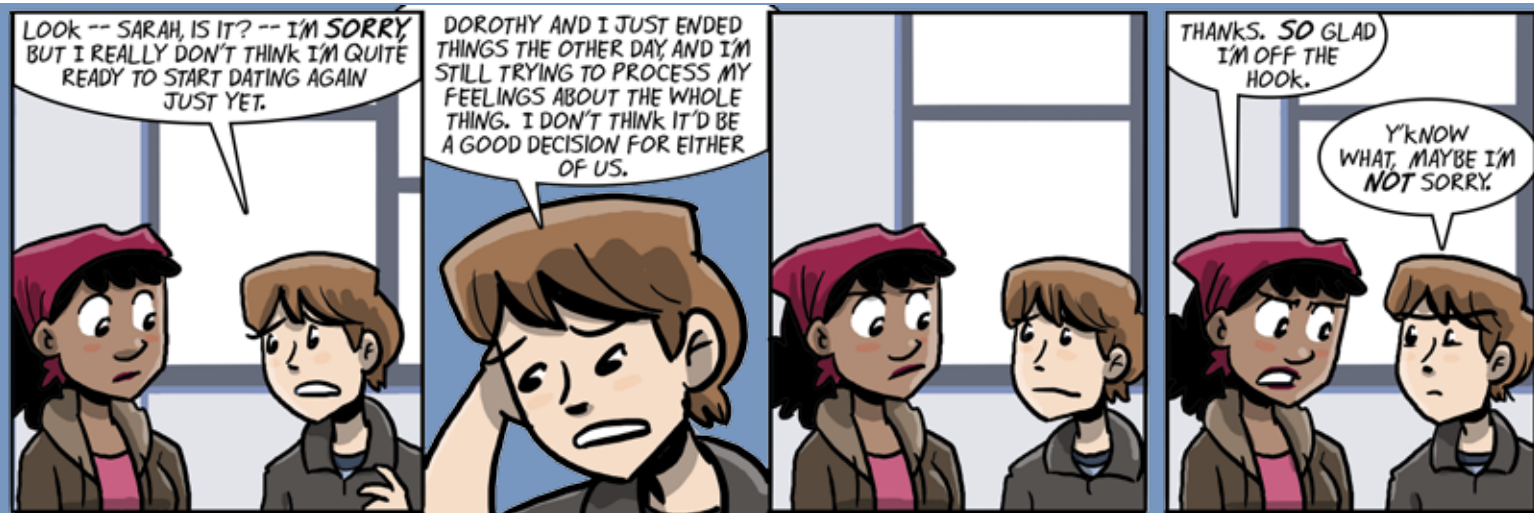
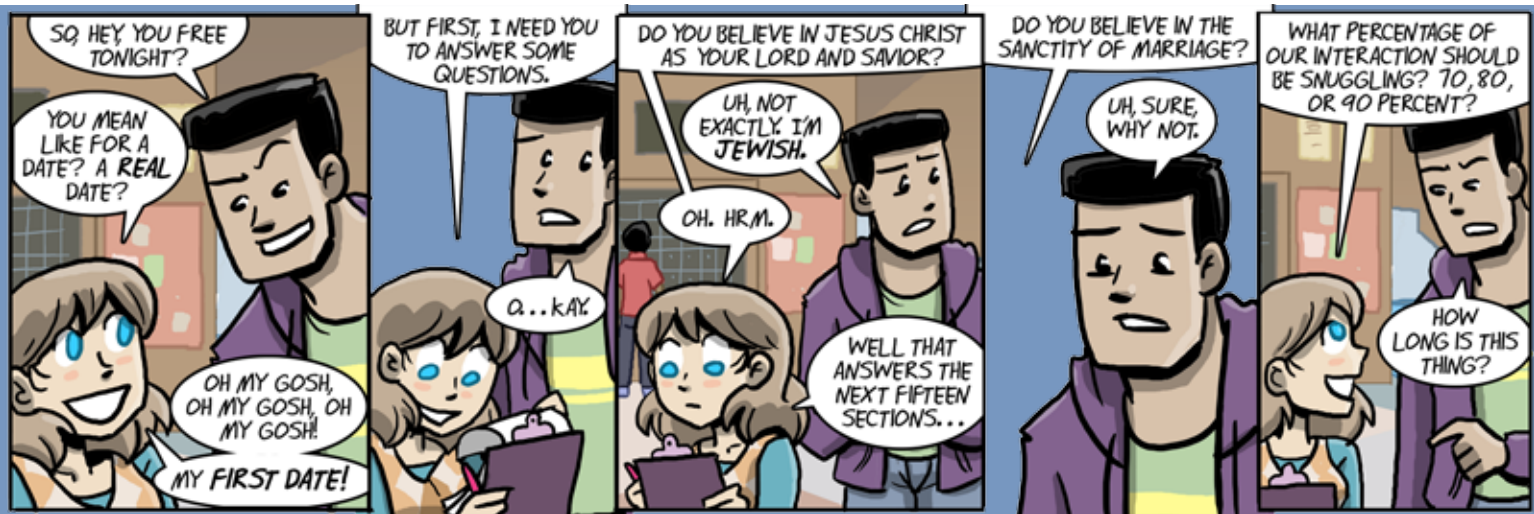


Check out Walky's "DAT DOROTHY" face.

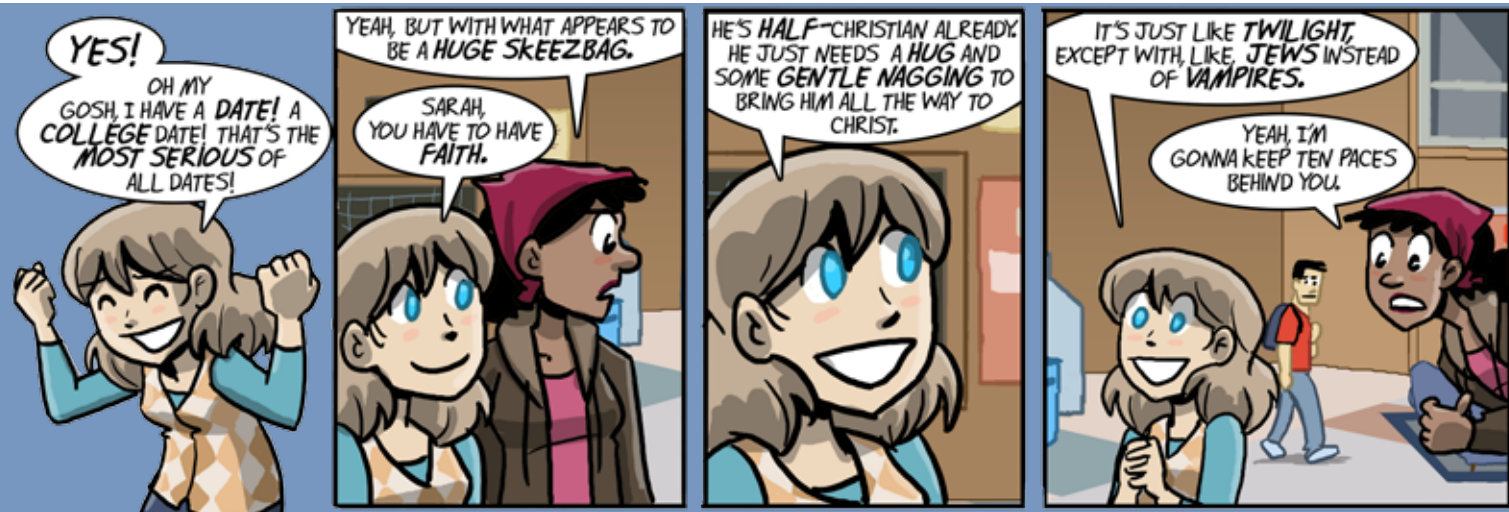
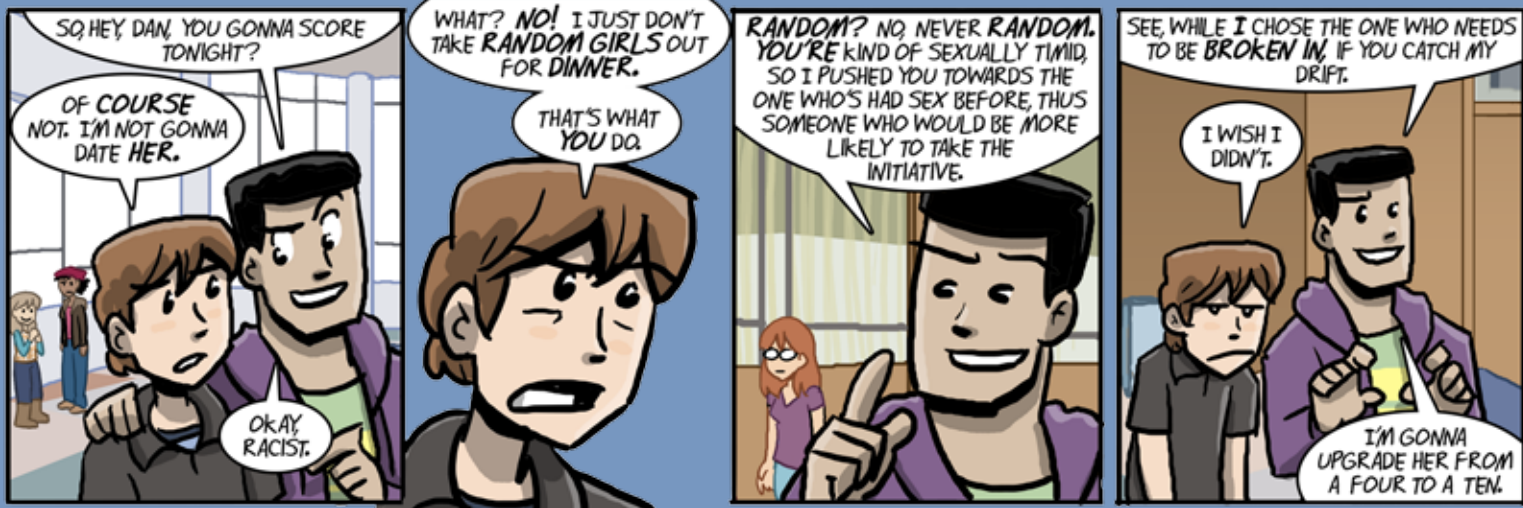


Note "CLARK WING" written on the wall behind Joyce and Sarah in the third panel. Joe and Danny live in the Beck wing. This informs the title of this storyline.





I liked Danny and Sarah's chemistry here. I decided to pit them against each other more.



I look at that guy in the background of the fourth panel, and all I can think about is the Patterson-Gimlin Sasquatch film.



WALKY, WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING?



THIS IS THE *GIRLS* WING OF THE DORM. YOU CAN'T GO WANDERING IN HERE WEARING YOUR UNDERWEAR AND DROOLING LIKE SOME KIND OF *PERVERT*.



PERVERT? I'M NOT A PERVERT! I DON'T EVEN *LIKE* GIRLS! I HATE THEM! I'M GONNA GROW UP TO BE A KICK-ASS BACHELOR AN' LIVE ALONE!



AN' I'LL HAVE MY OWN AWESOME HOUSE WITH A WATER SLIDE AN', LIKE, A BALL PIT AN' I WON'T WEAR PANTS AN' NO ONE WILL GUILT ME OUTTA USIN' THE K MART BRAND OF SOAP



NICE SEEING YOU, BILLIE. GUESS I KNOW BETTER THAN TO ASK IF YOU WANT TO GO HAVE LUNCH.

HE *CAN* BE TAUGHT.



ABOUT TIME THAT TWERP REALIZED THERE'S A *PECKING ORDER* AROUND HERE.

HE'S AT THE *BOTTOM*, AND AT THE *TOP* OF IT IS--



RUTH!

SHE *CAN* BE TAUGHT.

IT'S "BILLIE," RIGHT? HARD TO RECOGNIZE YOU WITHOUT YOUR FACE BURIED IN A CHAIR CUSHION.



LET ME GUESS, THAT WAS YOUR UNKEMPT, SLEEP-PANTSED BOY-FRIEND IN HIS "WALK OF SHAME"?



--WHAT?

TH-THAT IS NOT MY BOY-FRIEND!



YEAH, DON'T ACTUALLY CARE ANYWAY--

THAT IS A DIRTY, RETARDED LITTLE FREAK WHO I DO NOT ASSOCIATE WITH OH MY GOD COLLEGE IS STUPID ENOUGH WITHOUT HIM FUCKING EVERYTHING UP FOR ME I'M GONNA S--- HIS SCRAWNY LITTLE



I HATE YOU AND YOUR PROBLEMS.

LISTEN, I DON'T HAVE ALL DAY. THE ONLY REASON YOU EVEN HAVE MY ATTENTION AT THE MOMENT IS THAT I DON'T YET HAVE YOUR ROOMMATE AGREEMENT FORMS.



I HAVEN'T EVEN TALKED TO HER YET! SAL COMES IN AFTER I GO TO SLEEP AND LEAVES BEFORE I WAKE UP!



YEAH, THAT DOESN'T SOUND MADE UP

BUT TELL YOU WHAT. RECOGNIZE THIS?



... MY CHEERLEADER UNIFORM?

OH, GOOD, IT IS YOURS.

IT LOOKED A LITTLE... SMALL FOR YOU. REGARDLESS, YOU CAN HAVE IT BACK WHEN I GET YOUR FORMS.



...WHAT?

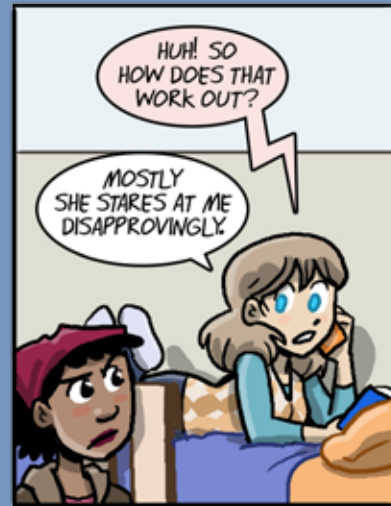
I'M CALLING YOU FAT, GENIUS.

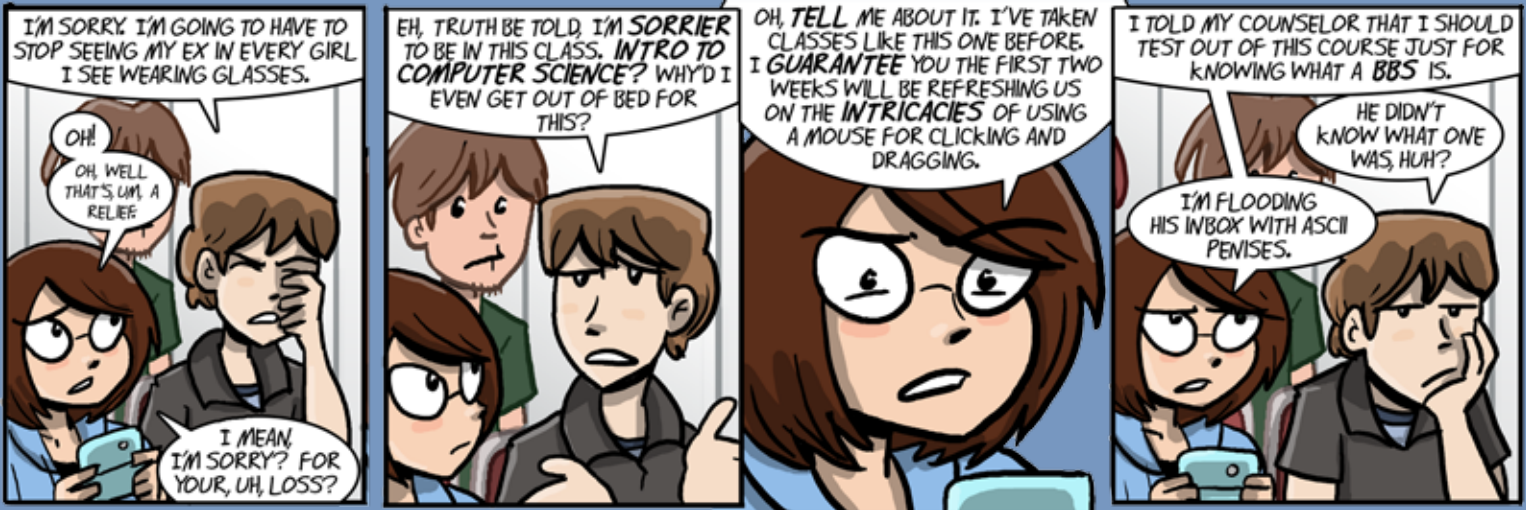


Billie thinks like I do, except replace “whiskey” with “Taco Bell.” Well, no. Keep the whiskey, add Taco Bell.

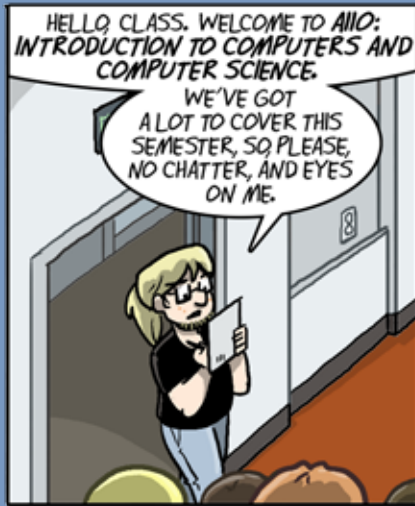


Platitudes are so contradictory.





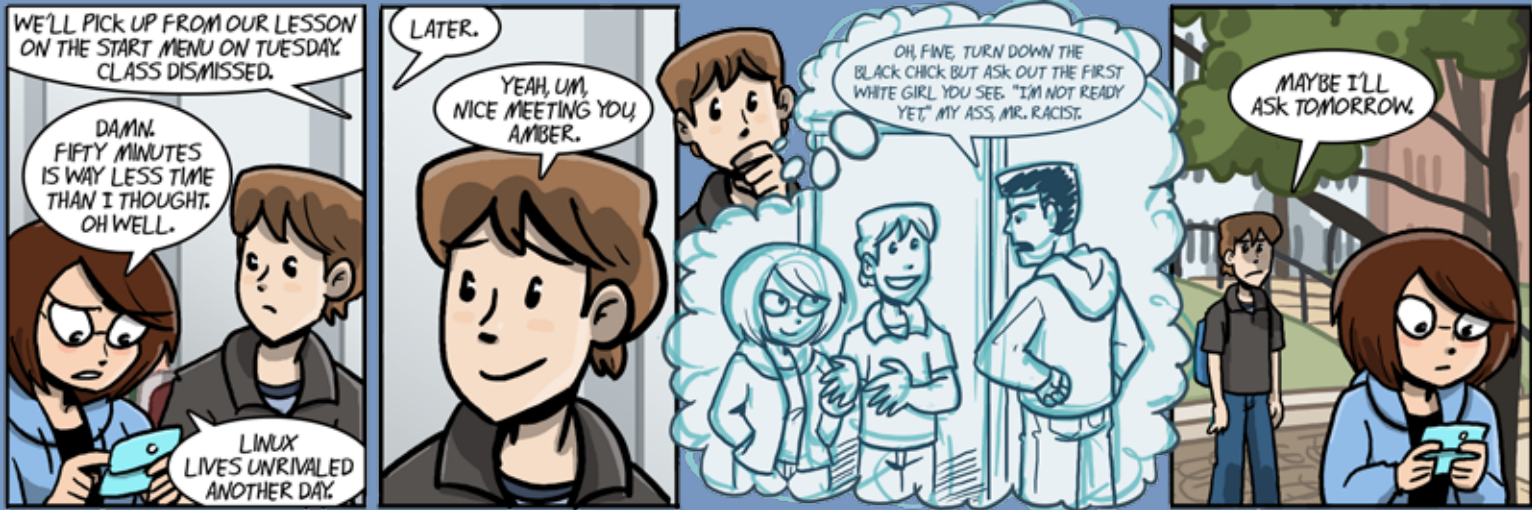
I try not to make my characters too snarkily knowledgeable about stuff way older than them so it doesn't get all Diablo Cody up in this shizz, but sometimes I can't help it. (Besides, nerds research.)



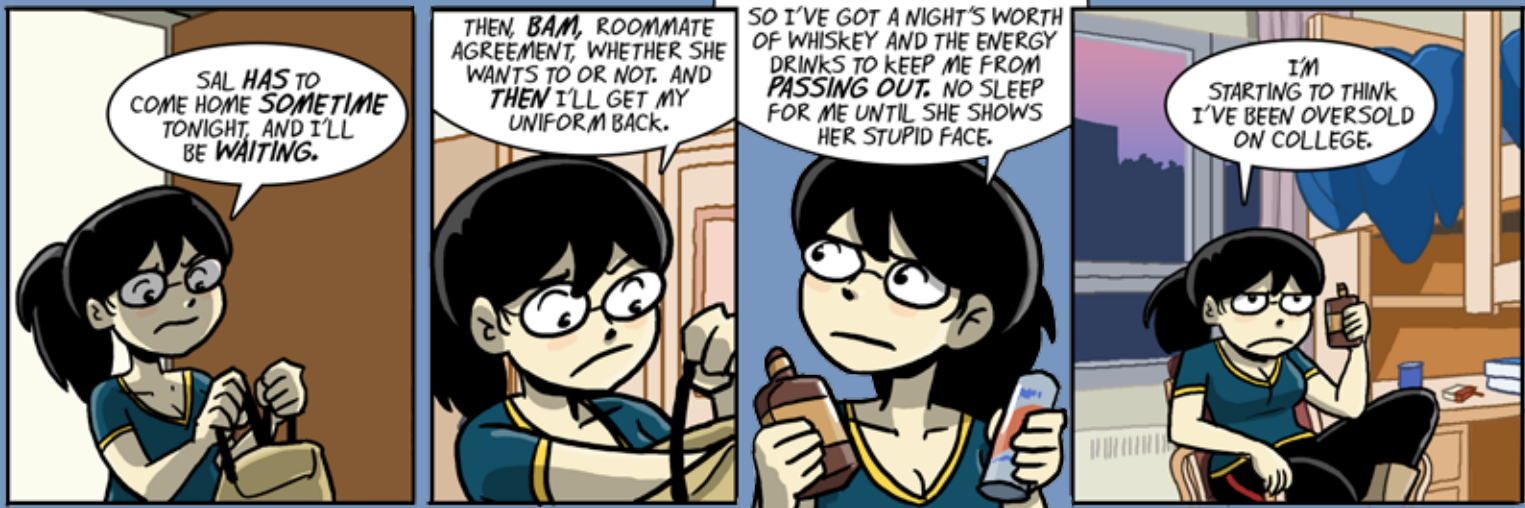
Their teacher is a guy named Alex. He was a character from *Roomies!* who everyone kept asking about, so I threw him in here so folks would stop asking. He was just a computer guy, so Amber and Danny kind of make him redundant anyway.



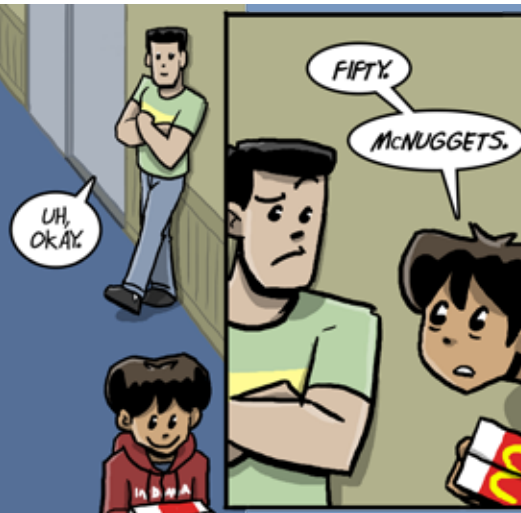




I really liked this style of thought bubble, with the blue pencil lines remaining. I must find more excuses to use it.





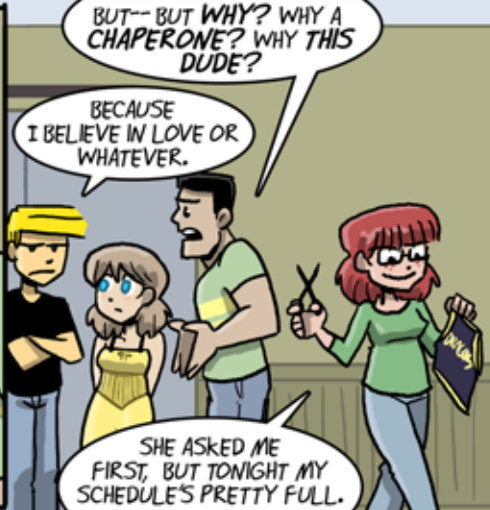
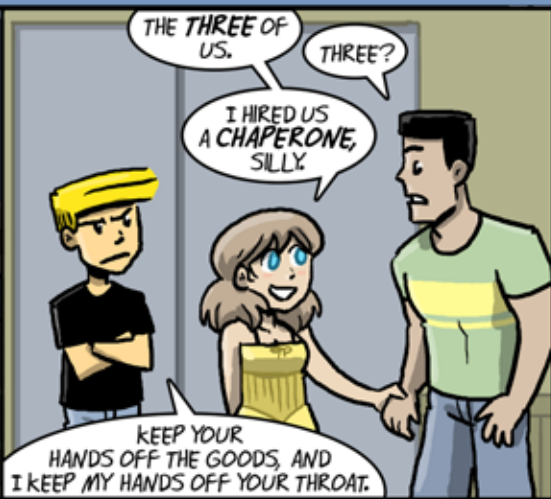


These 50 McNuggets boxes exist, but here they're only available on college football game weekends.



HELLA







JOE ROSENTHAL

Hometown: Mishawaka, Indiana

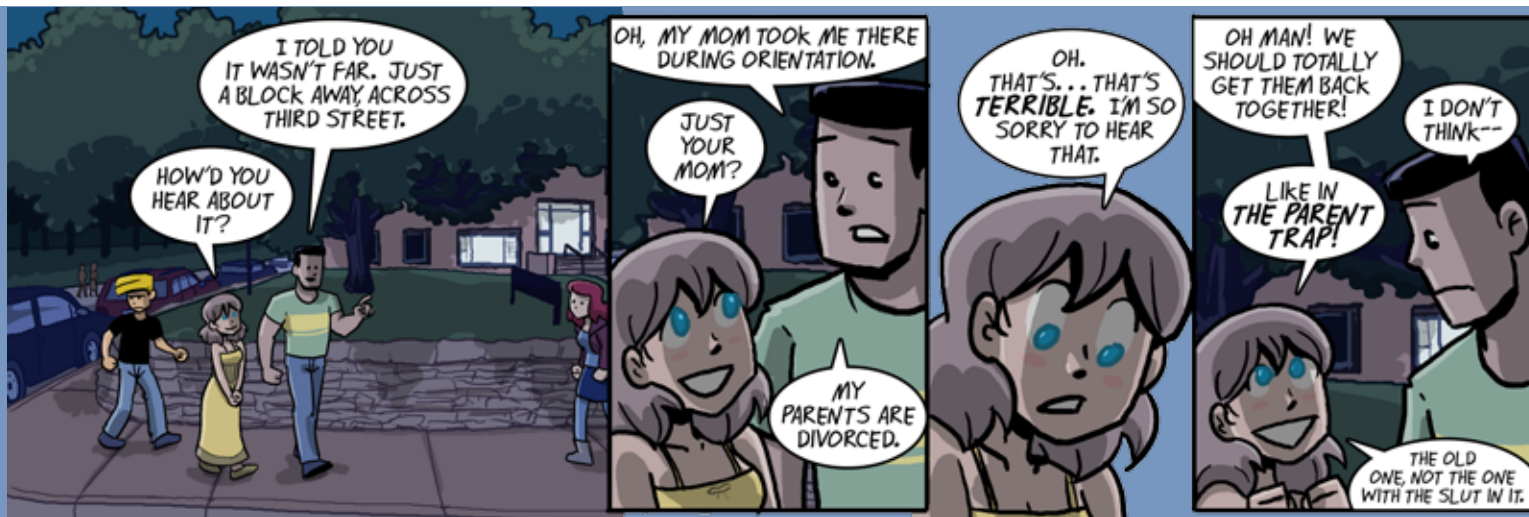
Major: Undeclared

Likes: Boobs, butts, waists, vaginas

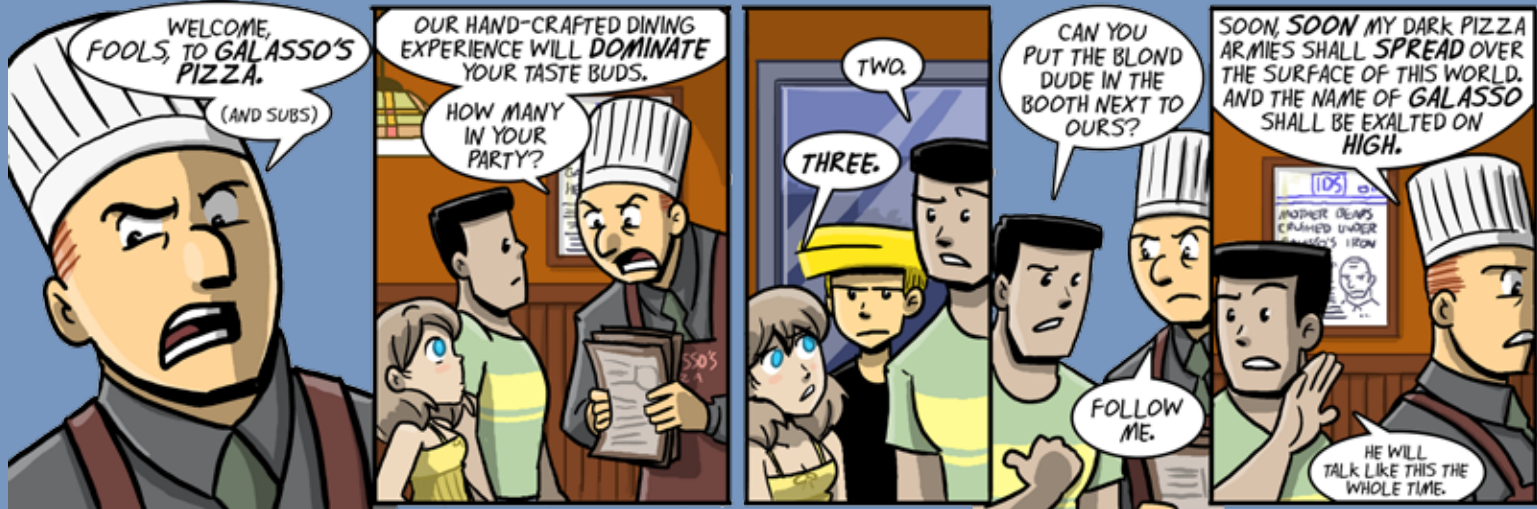
If you've got a rack and you're moving, Joe is checking you out. If he has no real scholarly aspirations, why is he in college? The babes, man, the babes. They put out here! He's seen the videos.

Joe thinks of himself as a sex evangelist. Sex is fucking awesome, literally, and he just wants to spread the good news. Everyone would like it if they'd just try it. Thankfully, he's huge on mutual consent.

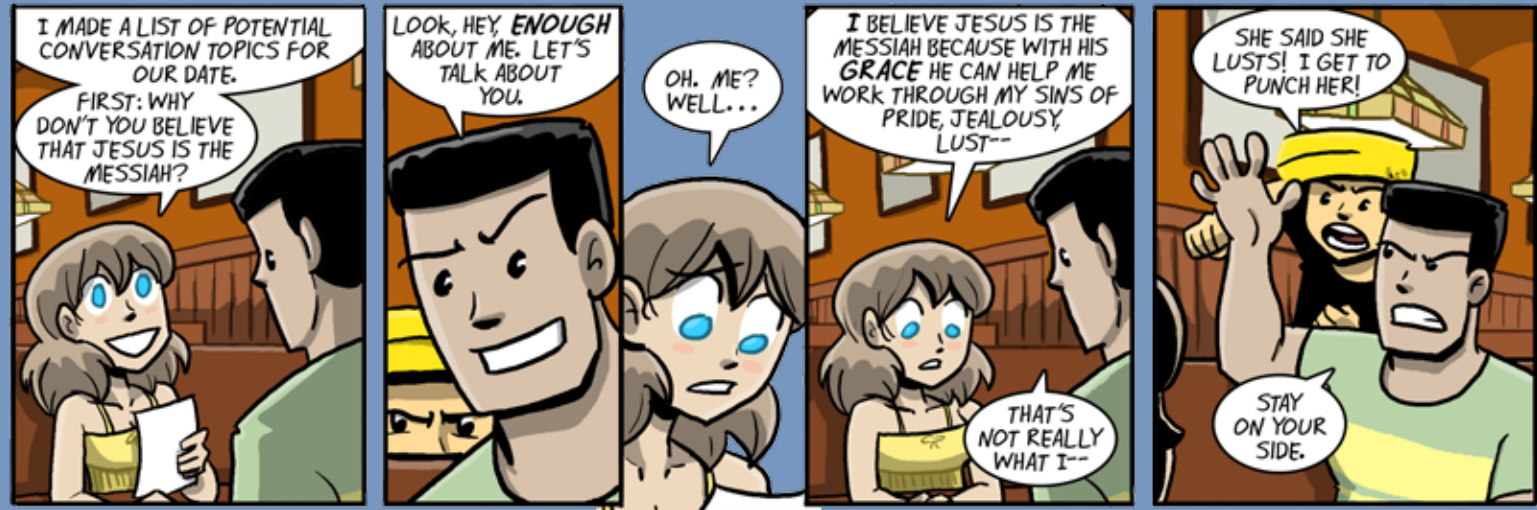




"Bass violin" is a regional nickname for the double bass where I grew up. Joe grew up there, too.



The framed newspaper article in the last panel tells some backstory. At some point in *Dumbing of Age's* universe, Galasso's Pizza (and Subs) bought out Mother Bear's Pizza, a real-life pizza place across the street from campus.



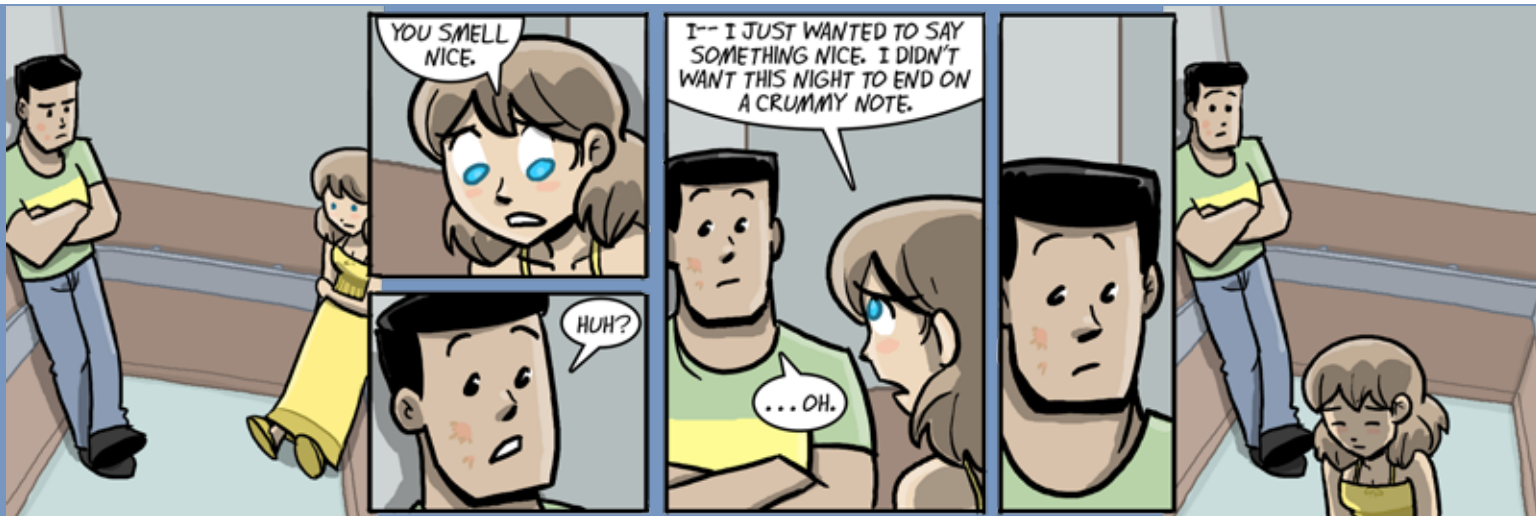


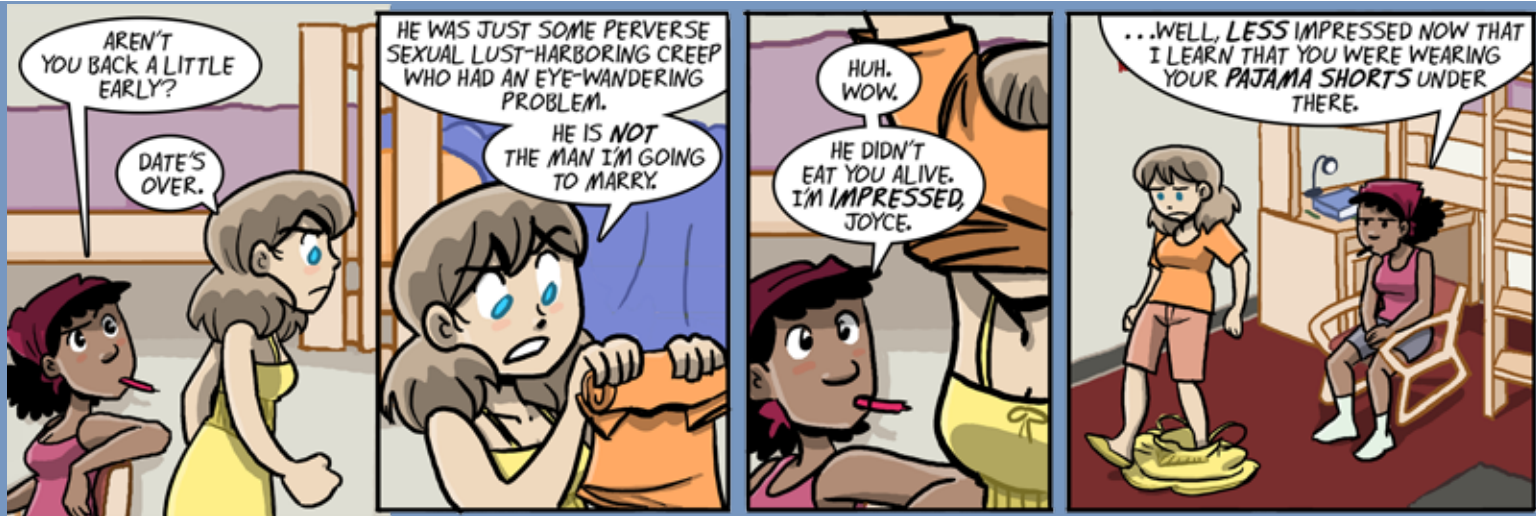


I spent forever trying to figure out what Mike likes on pizza. Apparently it's not what I like.



When I was Joyce's age, I was so against swearing of any kind that other kids would offer to pay me money to swear. Like, in dollar increments. And I refused. I'm pretty sure that's gonna be a *DoA* story idea eventually.



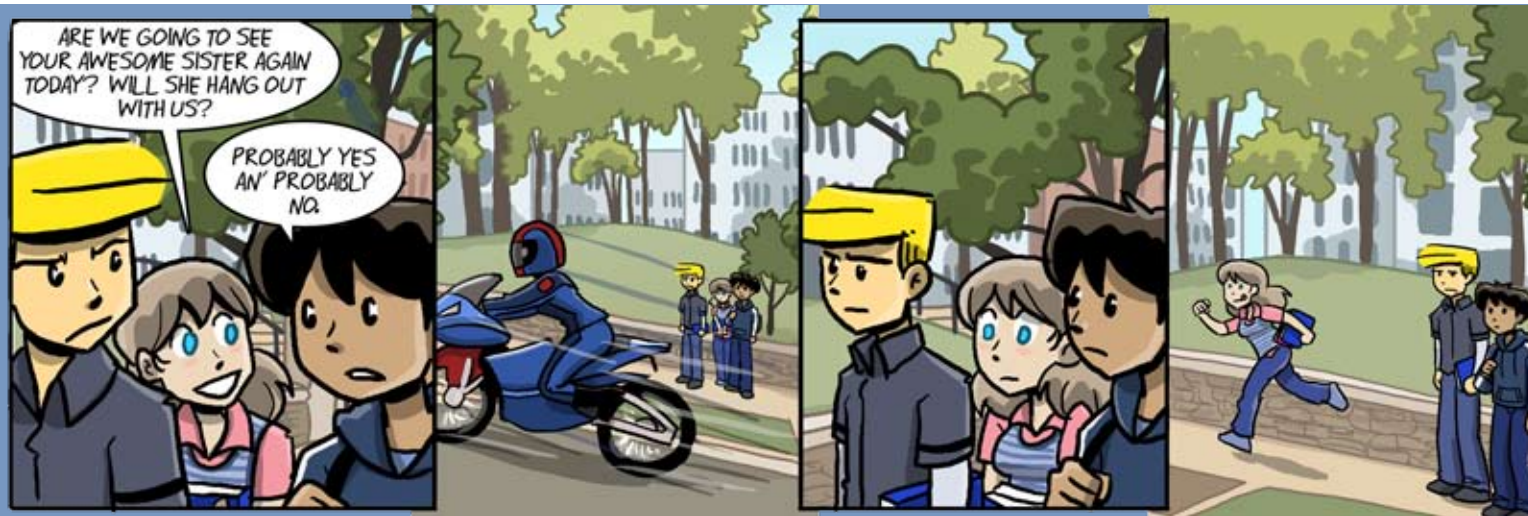
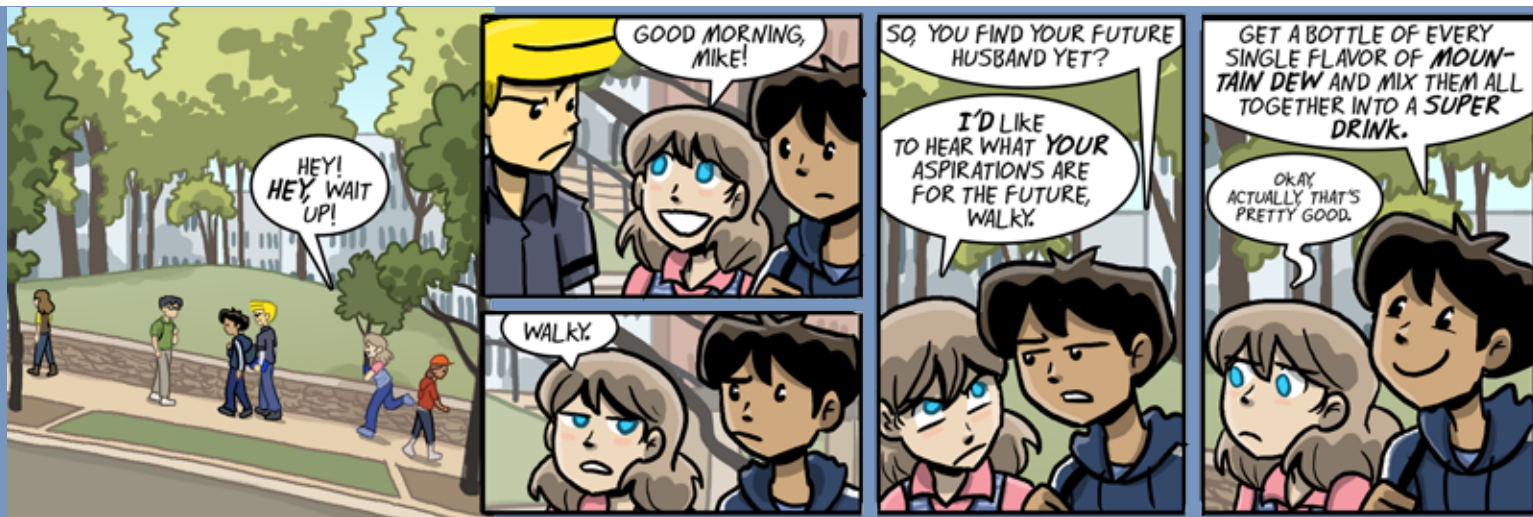


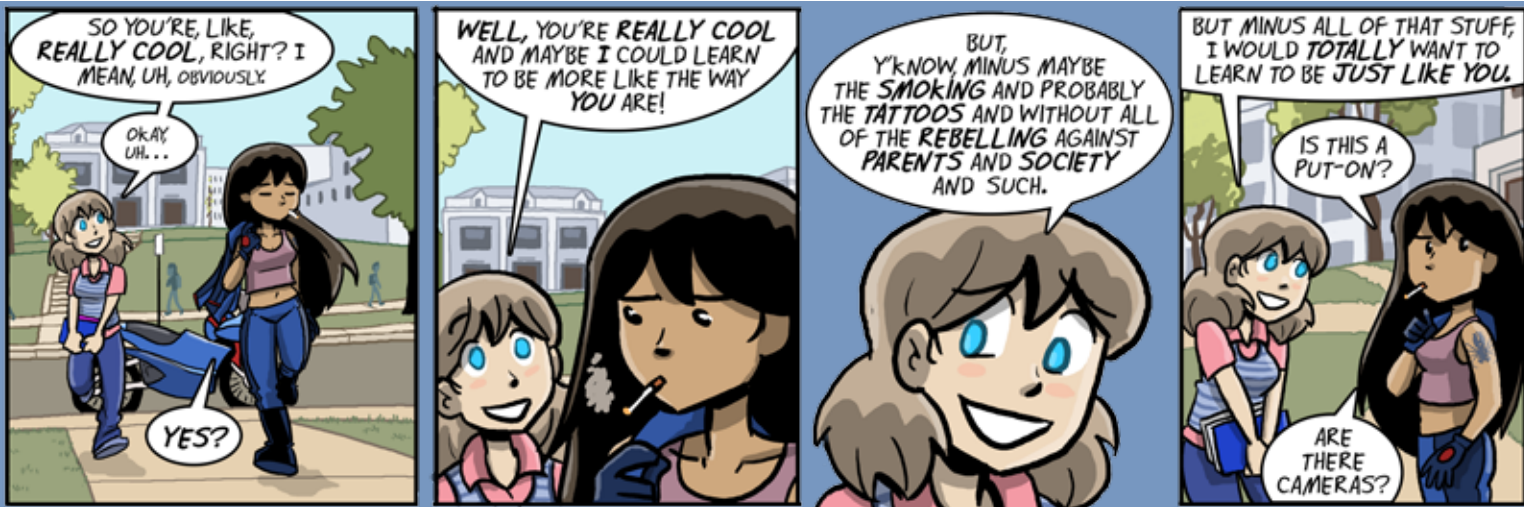
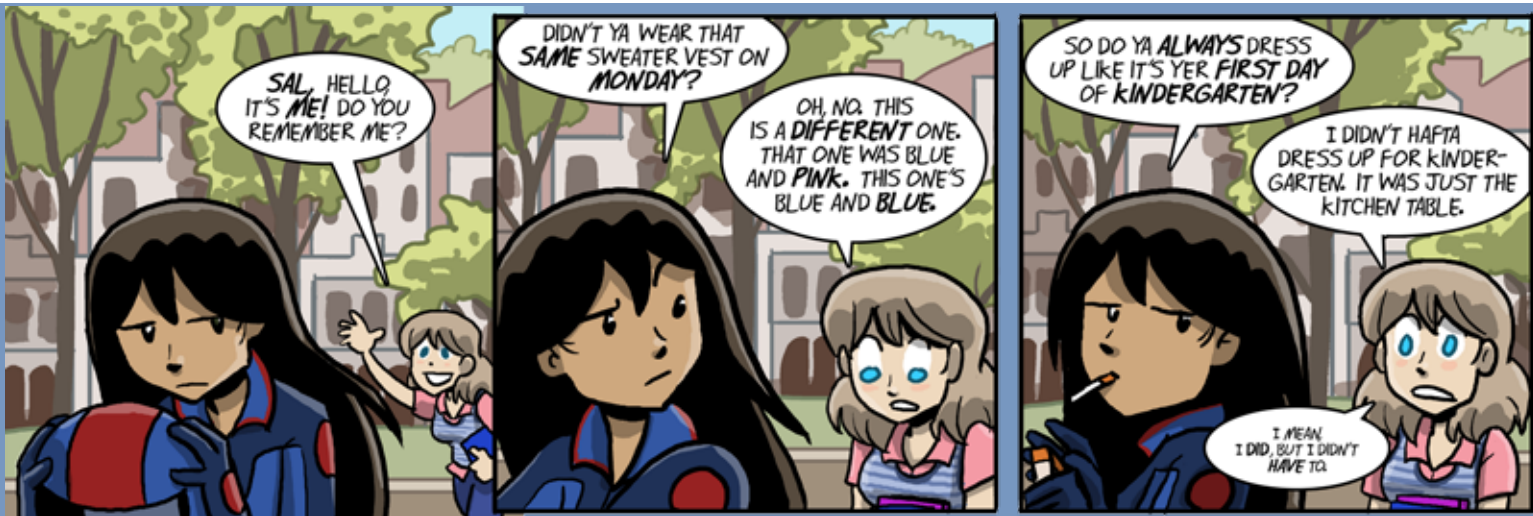
Robo-Vac is a superhero who's half cop, half vacuum cleaner.



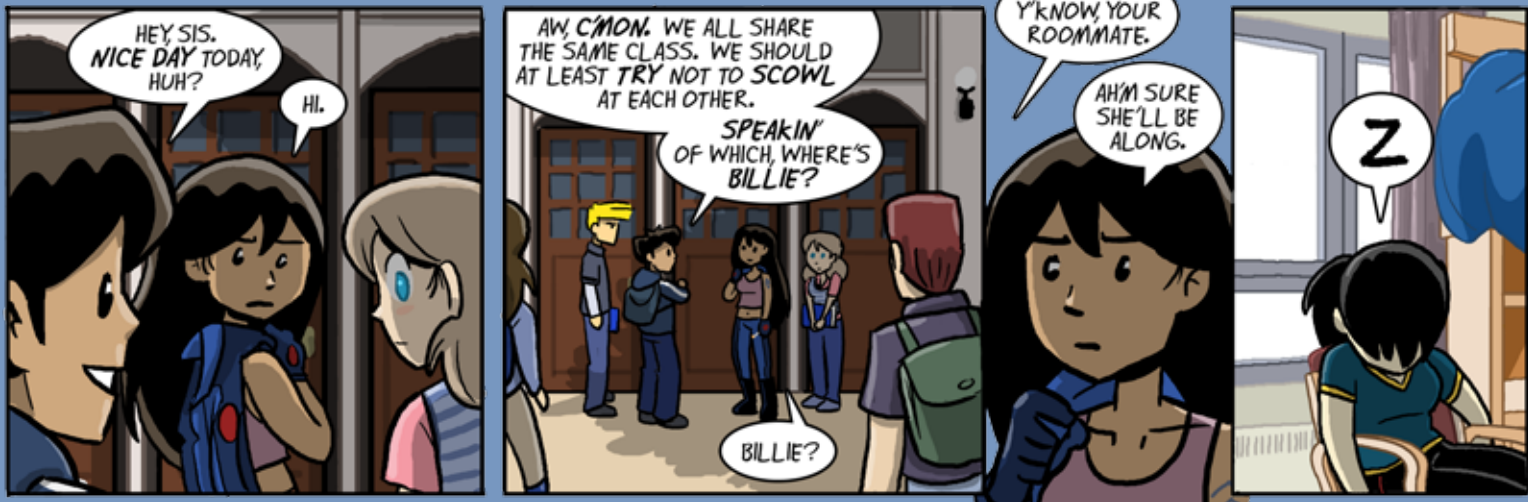
THE BECHDEL TEST





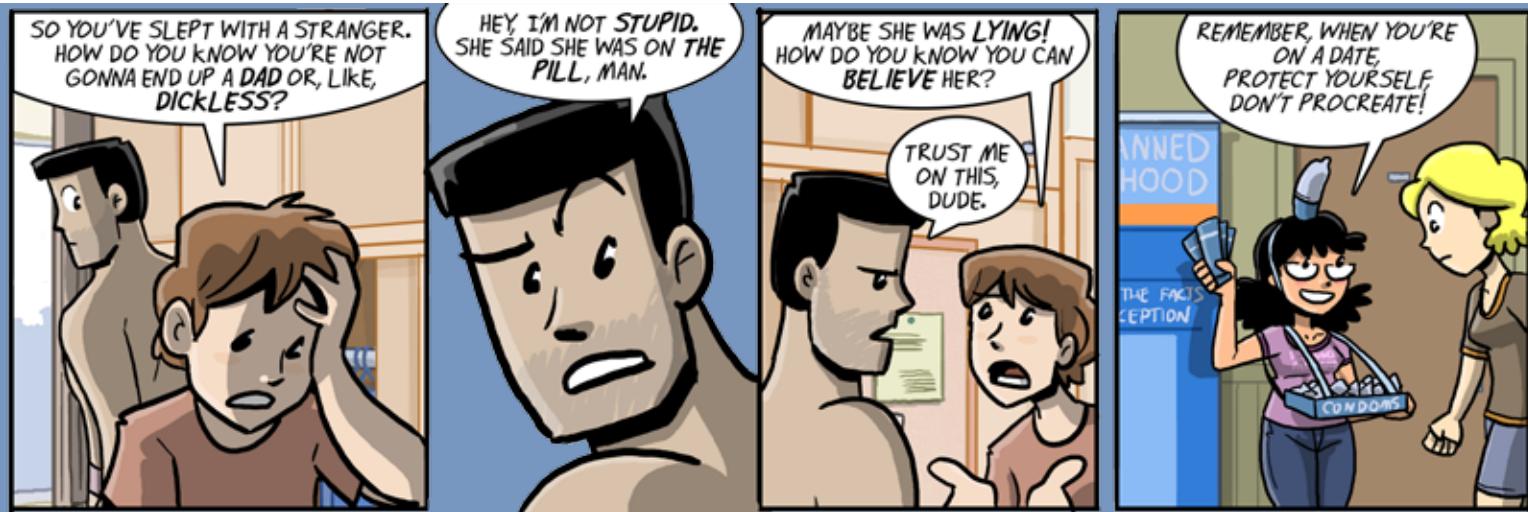


Sal's tattoo on her arm is of a robot spider. They're her, *ahem*, tarantuguns.



Without that "Z" bubble in the last panel, this strip is transformed into one about how Sal murdered her roommate.





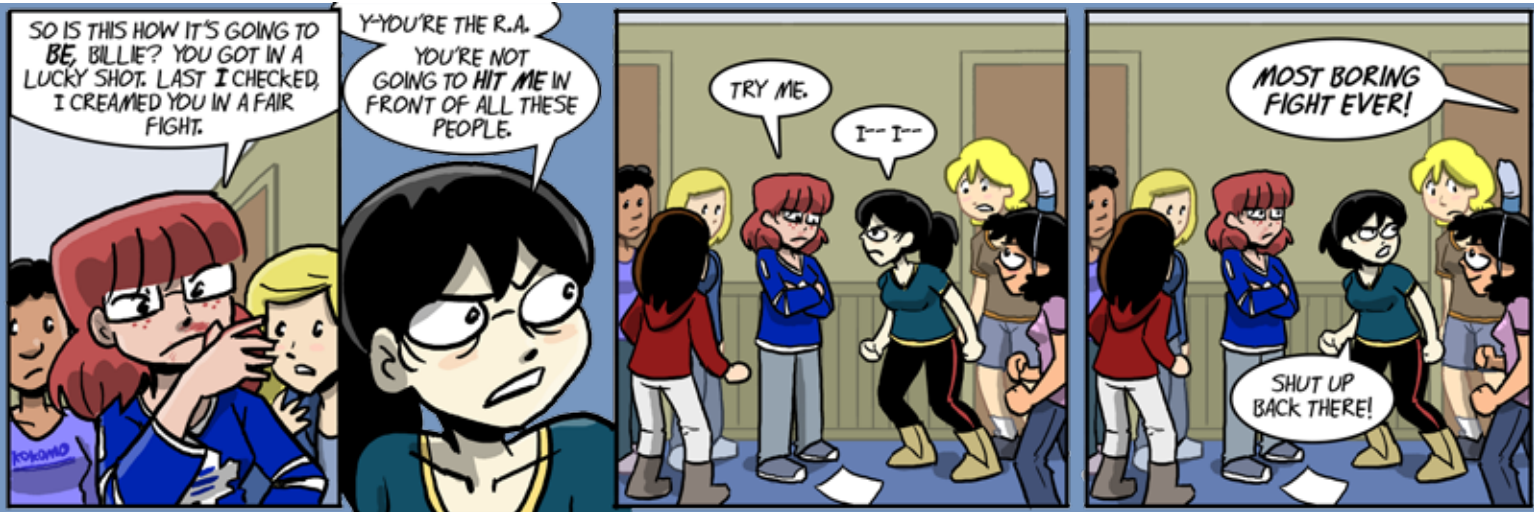
I work with a several-week buffer of strips, and before this strip published, there was some sort of national brouhaha about Planned Parenthood potentially losing its funding.



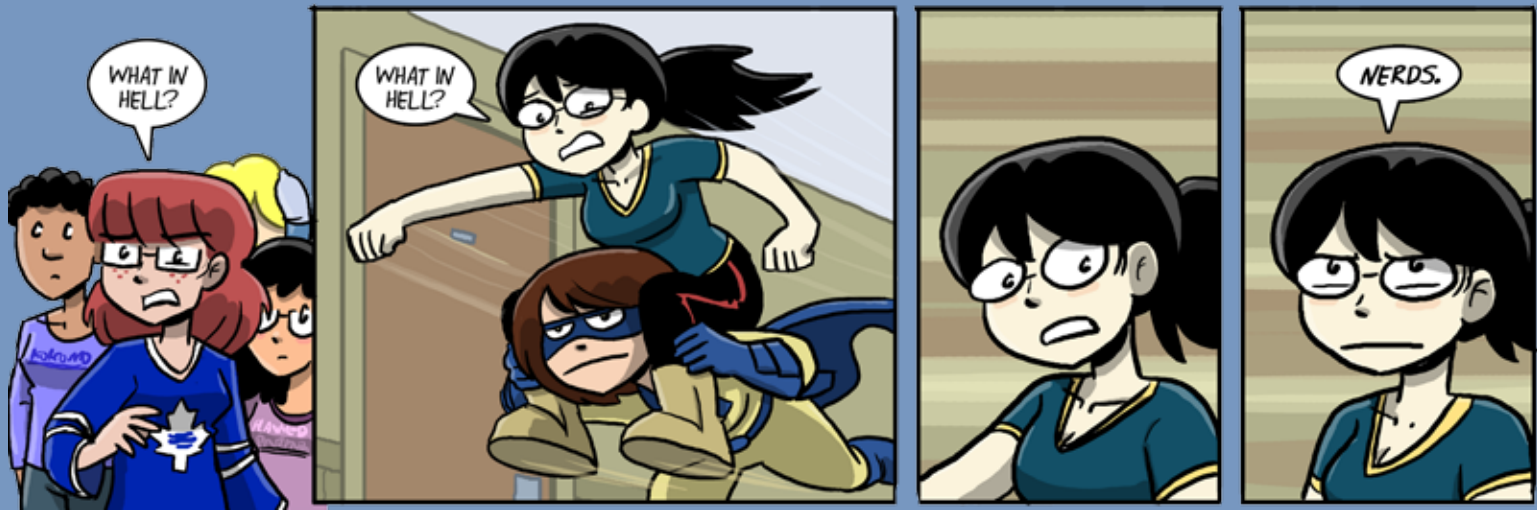
But Planned Parenthood persevered, as they tend to, and these strips didn't become anachronisms before they were published.







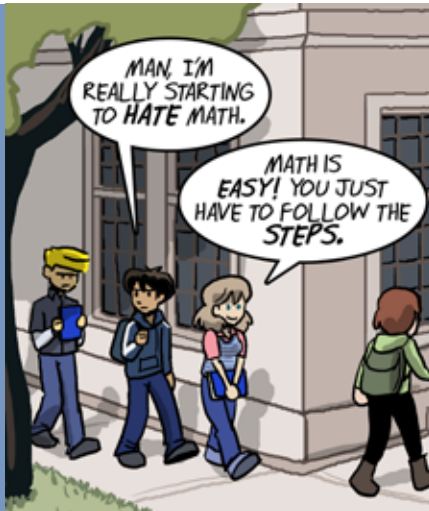
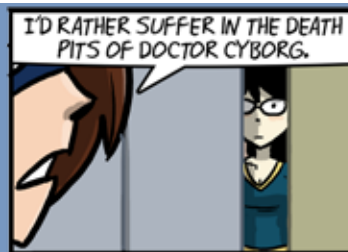
This was the worst weekend cliffhanger ever. Seriously, what is going on? Everyone was all *whaaaaaaaaaaaaaa*?

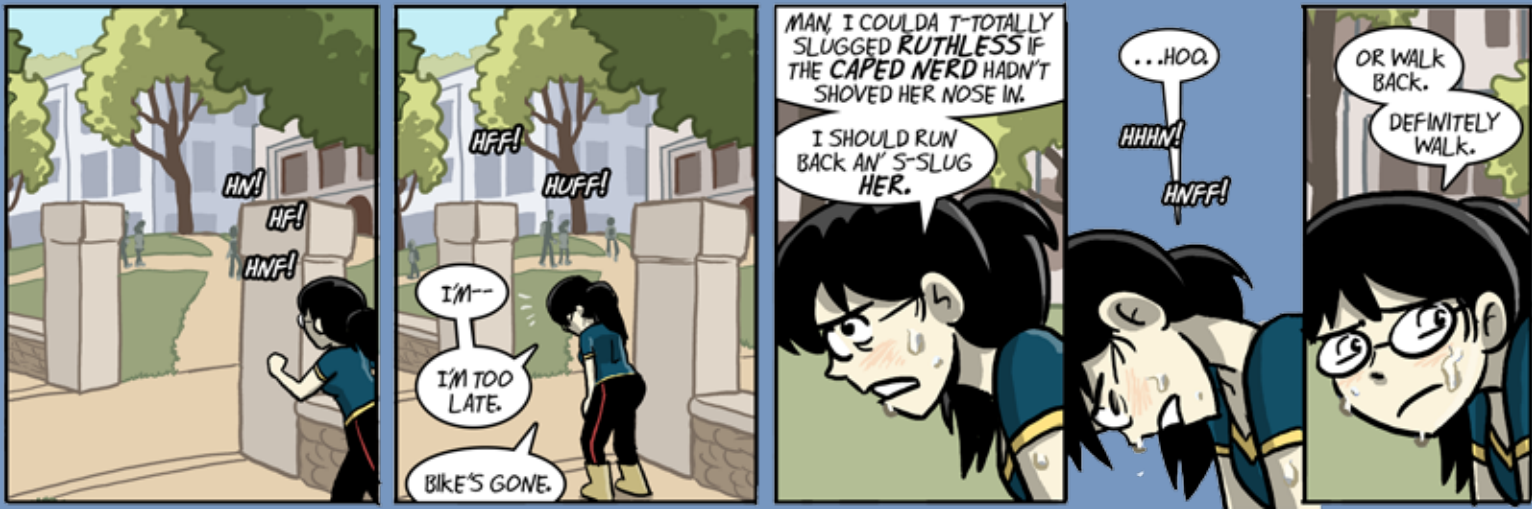


Oh, okay, that's what's going on.

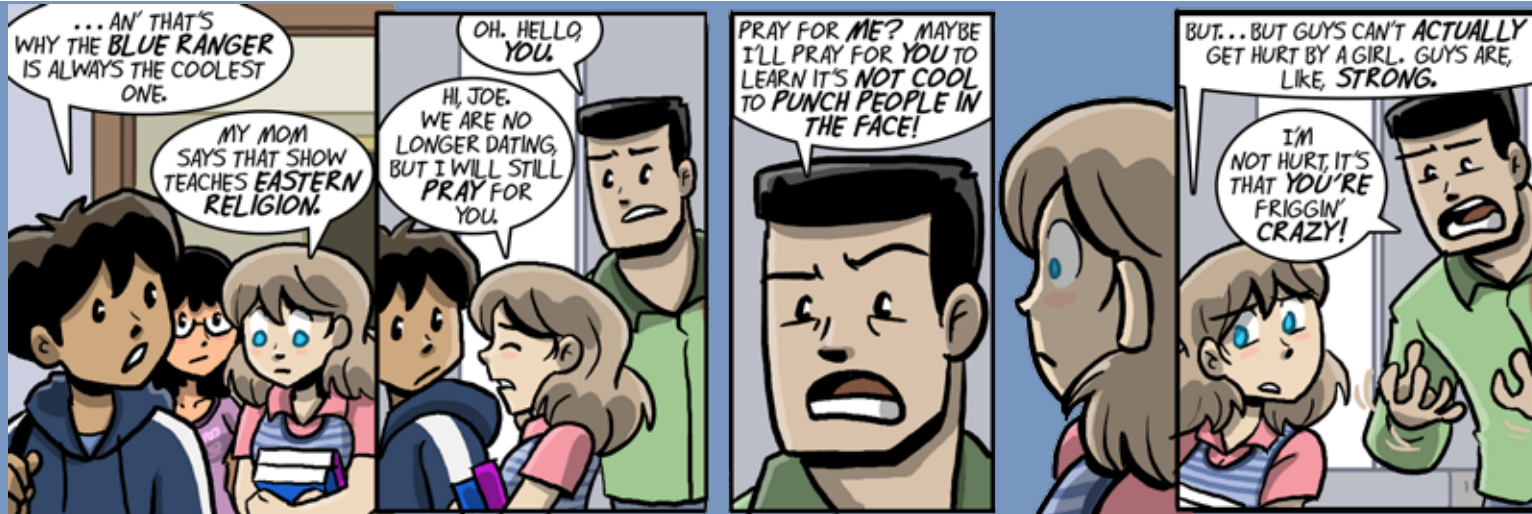


Some folks saw this as a shot at Billie's heftiness, but, c'mon dudes, Amazi-Girl is carrying someone basically her exact size. That's gonna wind anybody.

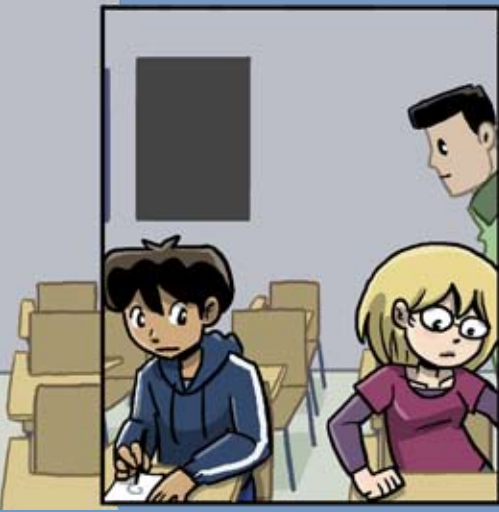
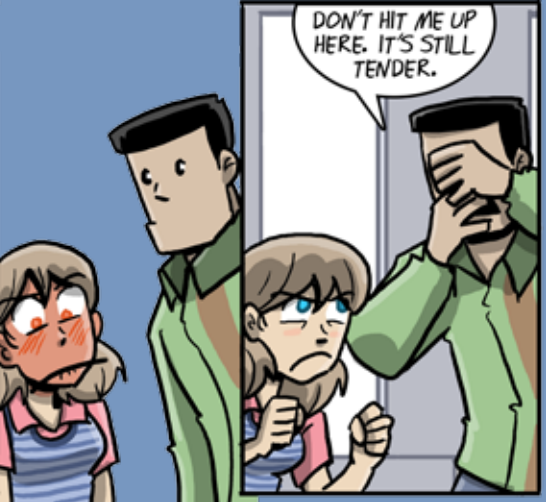


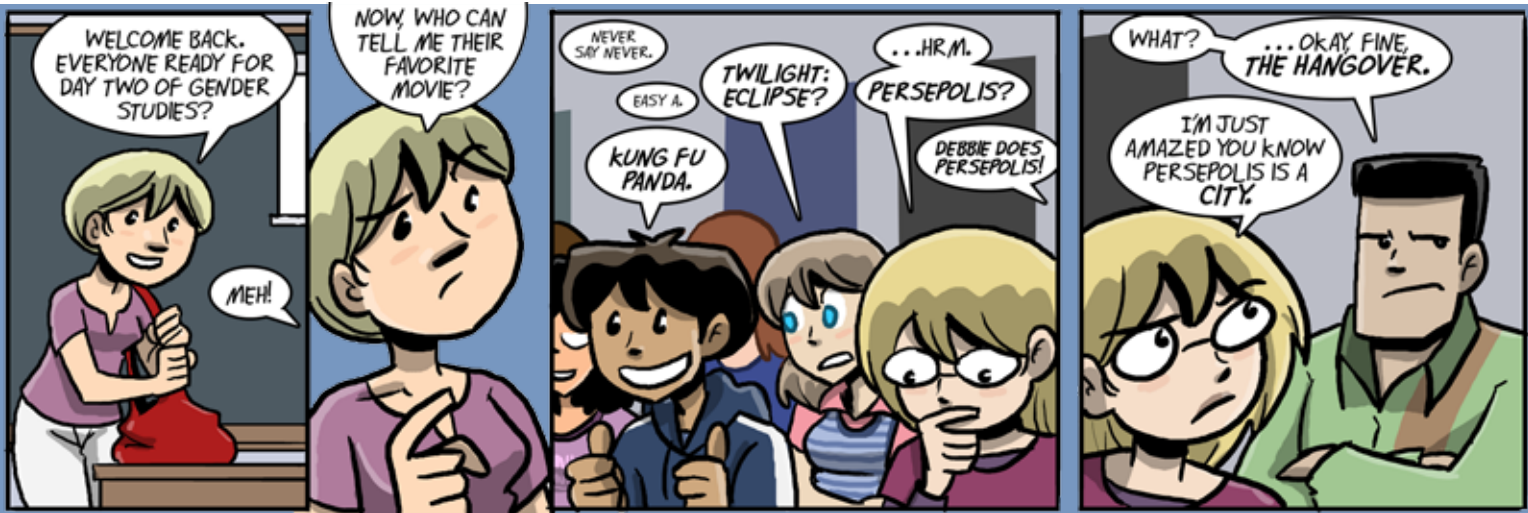
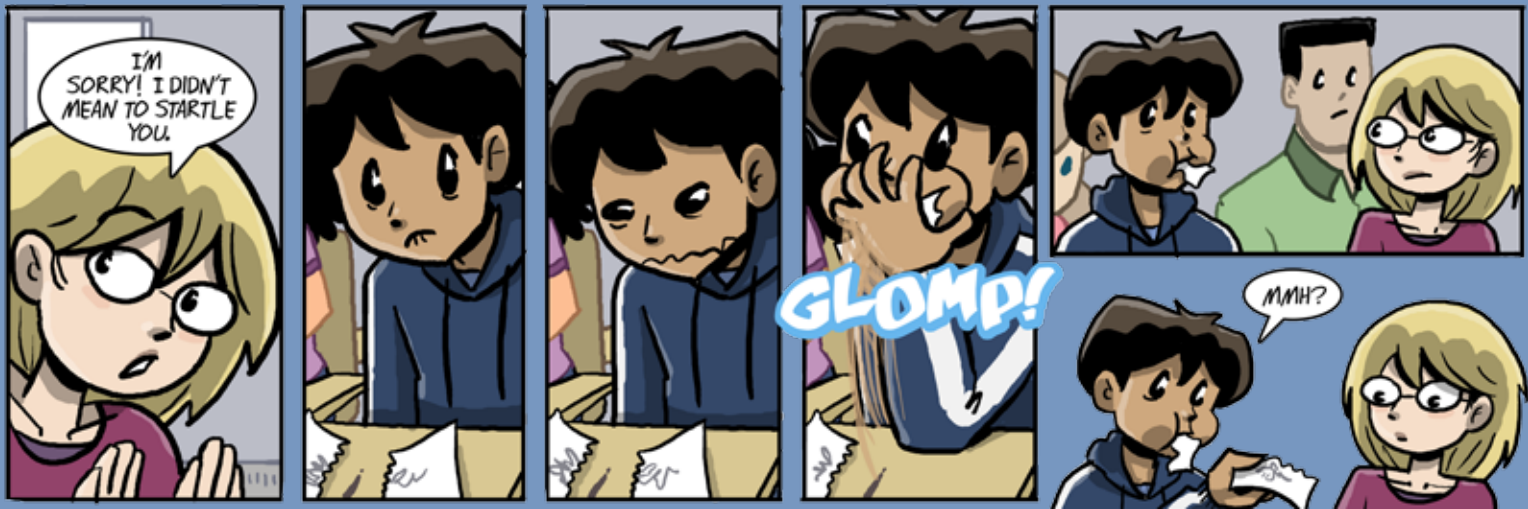


I tried valiantly to make that look like sweat.

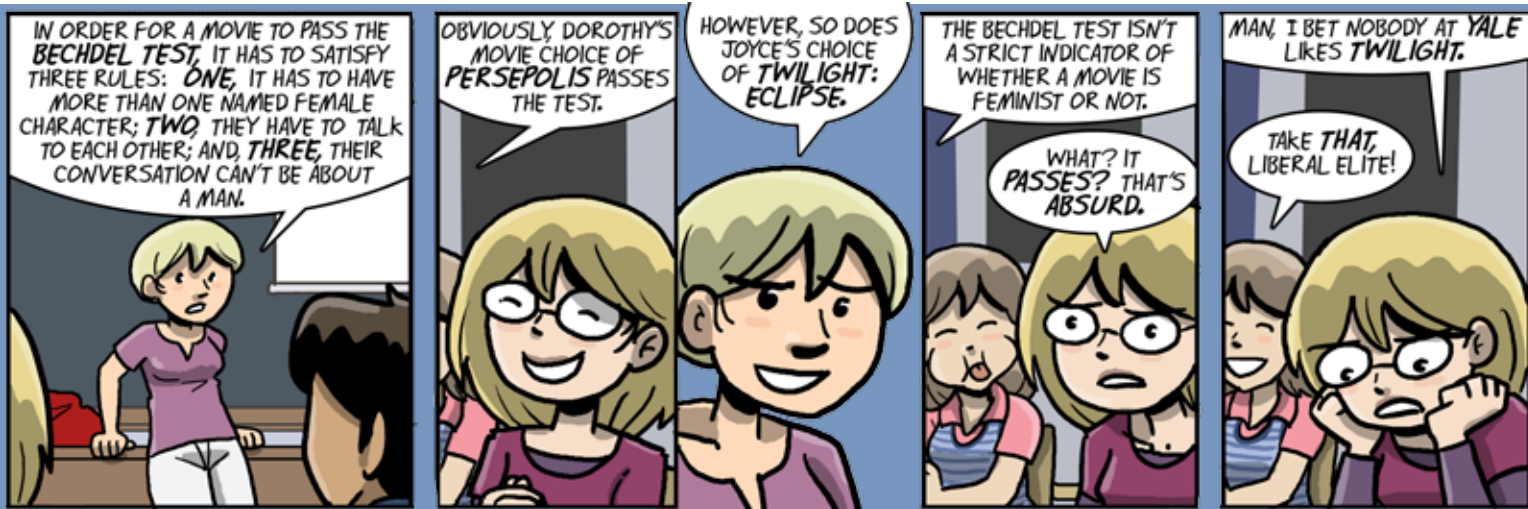


Joyce has three older brothers. She's smaller and weaker than them and can't get in trouble for hitting them because she's the baby sister. Of course she's going to think men are invincible.





One of the downsides of time passing so slowly in Dumbing of Age is that eventually, thanks to this strip, my characters will be fans of vintage films.



The Bechdel Test comes from Alison Bechdel's comic *Dykes to Watch Out For* (dykestowatchoutfor.com).

THOUGH WE CAN'T USE THE BECHDEL TEST TO DETERMINE WHICH MOVIES ARE FEMINIST, THE SHEER NUMBER OF MOVIES THAT **DON'T** PASS THE TEST IS A SYMPTOM OF A GREATER PROBLEM.



HEY, DOES IT REALLY **MATTER** IF CHICKS ONLY TALK ABOUT DUDES? I MEAN, REALLY, WHEN **I'M** WITH OTHER DUDES, I ONLY EVER TALK ABOUT **CHICKS**.



SO, JOE, YOU'RE SAYING THAT YOUR LIFE MAY NOT PASS THE "REVERSE" BECHDEL TEST?



NAW, IT TOTALLY DOES! JOE AN' ME TALKED ABOUT McNUGGETS JUST YESTERDAY!



YOU TALKED ABOUT McNUGGETS.

HEY, TEACH, MAYBE GIRLS IN MOVIES SHOULD TALK 'BOUT McNUGGETS MORE.



I'LL PASS THAT ALONG.

Yeah, I did that McNuggets strip a few pages back just so that later I could do this gag about the Reverse Bechdel Test.



SO DO I GET A JOB?



BILLIE, I REALIZE THAT YOU WERE THE EDITOR OF YOUR HIGH SCHOOL PAPER, BUT THAT WOULDN'T REALLY MAKE YOU **SPECIAL** HERE. I SUGGEST INSTEAD THAT YOU SUBMIT A STORY. IF IT'S **GOOD**, WE'LL RUN IT.



CAN IT BE A SPORTS STORY?



SURE, IF YOU MURDER AND REPLACE ONE OF THE DOZENS OF PEOPLE WHO ARE ALREADY IN CHARGE OF WRITING ABOUT SPORTS.

OKAY!

THAT WAS A JOKE.

YOU'RE JUST A FRESHMAN, BILLIE, SO TRY STARTING OUT **SMALL** WITH A SIMPLE HUMAN INTEREST STORY.



WHAT ABOUT AN EXPOSE ON MY R.A., WHO'S A TYRANNICAL, THIEVING **DICTATOR**?



YOU CAN POST YOUR REVENGE FANFIC ON YOUR **TUMBLR**.



THE **INDIANA DAILY STUDENT** IS A NEWSPAPER.

IT'S NOT FANFIC! SHE **STOLE MY PERSONAL PROPERTY** AND IS CUTTING IT TO PIECES!



WELL, IF THAT'S TRUE, THAT'S SOMETHING YOU SHOULD TAKE UP WITH HER **SUPERVISOR**, NOT THE IDS.



WHEN OR IF SHE'S FIRED, THEN MAYBE YOU CAN WRITE UP SOMETHING FOR US. WE'LL PUT IT IN "**NEWSBRIEFS**."



WE'RE NOT A GOSSIP RAG.



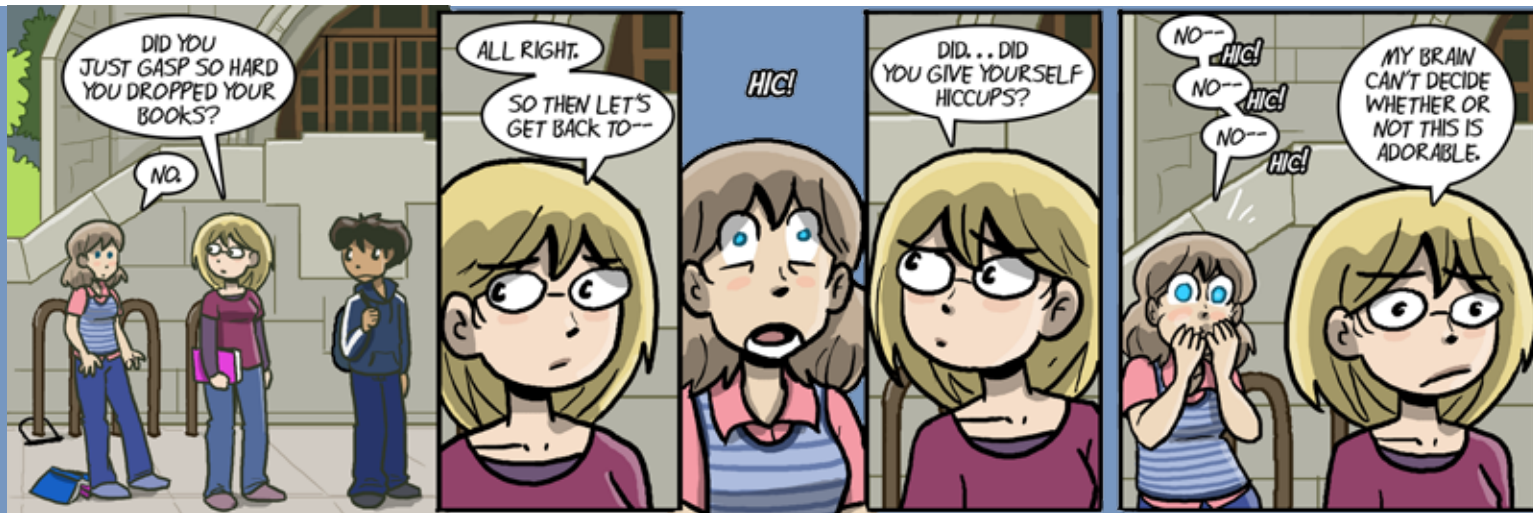
LOOK...

YOU NEED A STORY? I'LL CUT YOU A BREAK. THERE'S SOME REALLY **HOT GIRL** WITH AN **AWESOME MOTORCYCLE** ON CAMPUS. GET US HER STORY AND WE'LL PUT YOU IN "**ARTS**" OR SOMETHING.

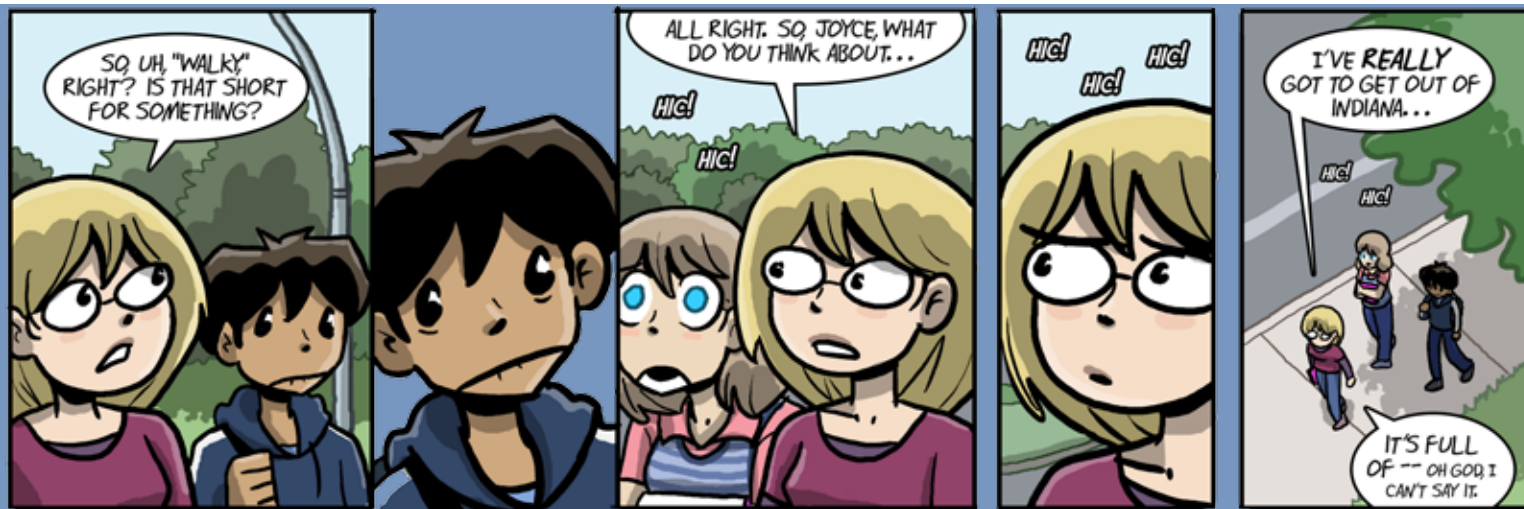


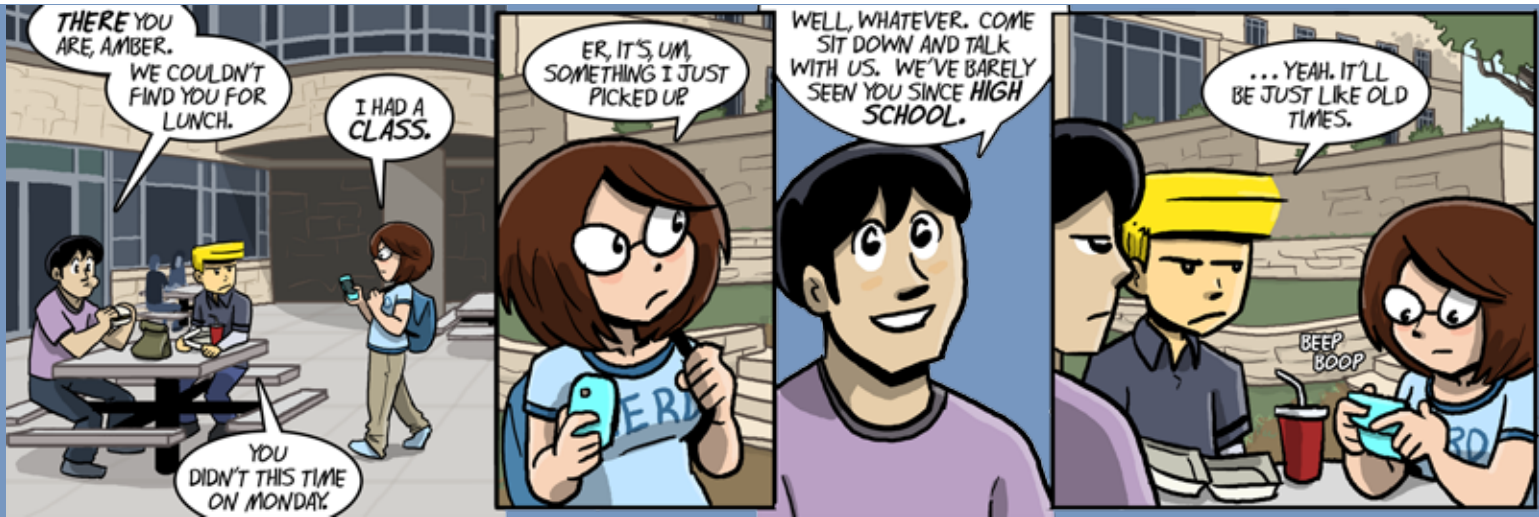


That last panel has been very useful to me on Tumblr.

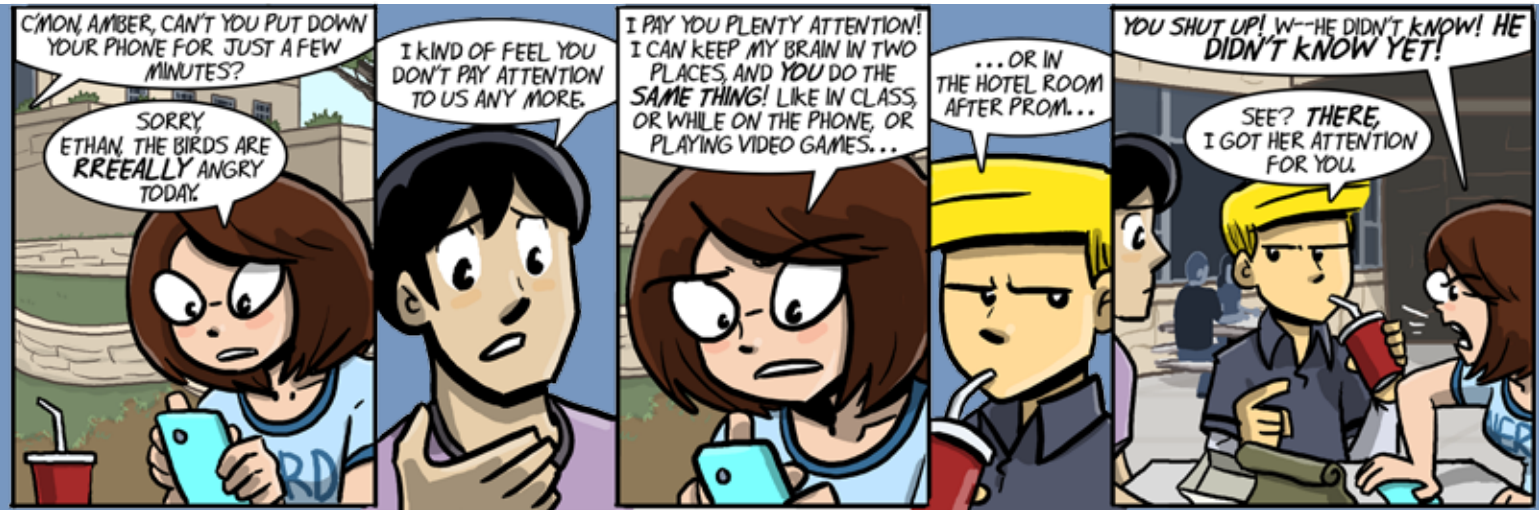


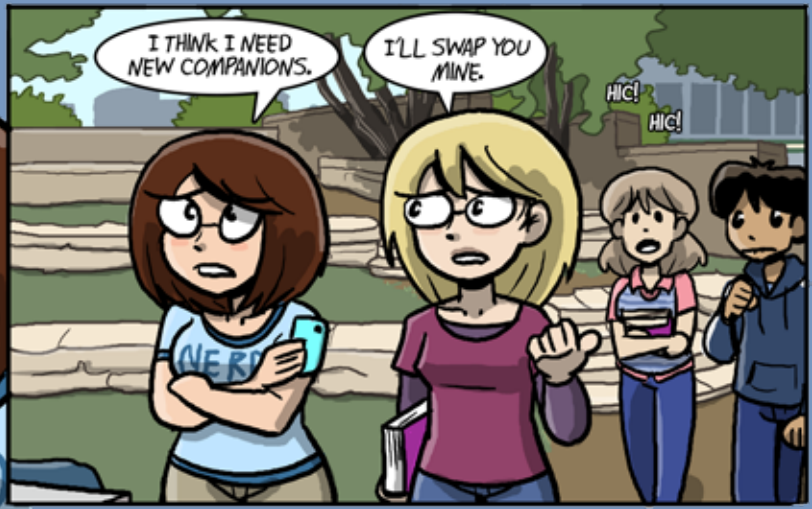
As it turns out, Dorothy has a weakness for adorable awkwardness. Within limits. That stuff has a shelf life.



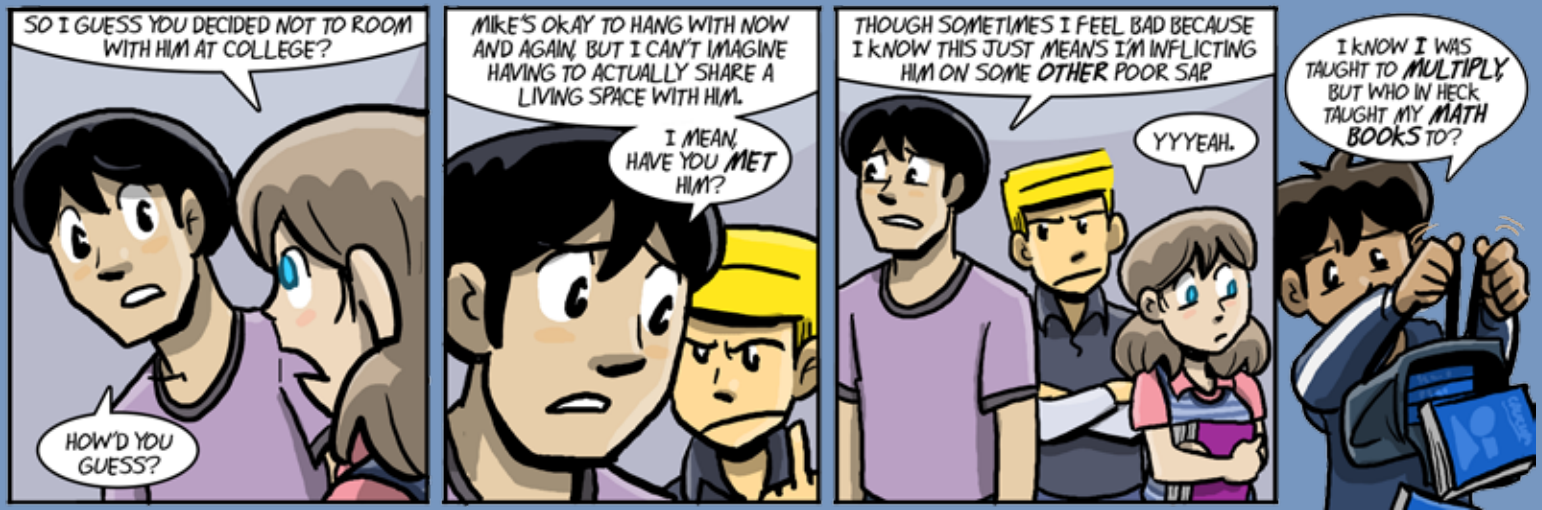


My pal Gordon McAlpin (multiplexcomic.com) visited his brother at Indiana University and took some photos of Read Hall for me. The backgrounds for this scene are sourced from his photos. Thanks, Gordon!

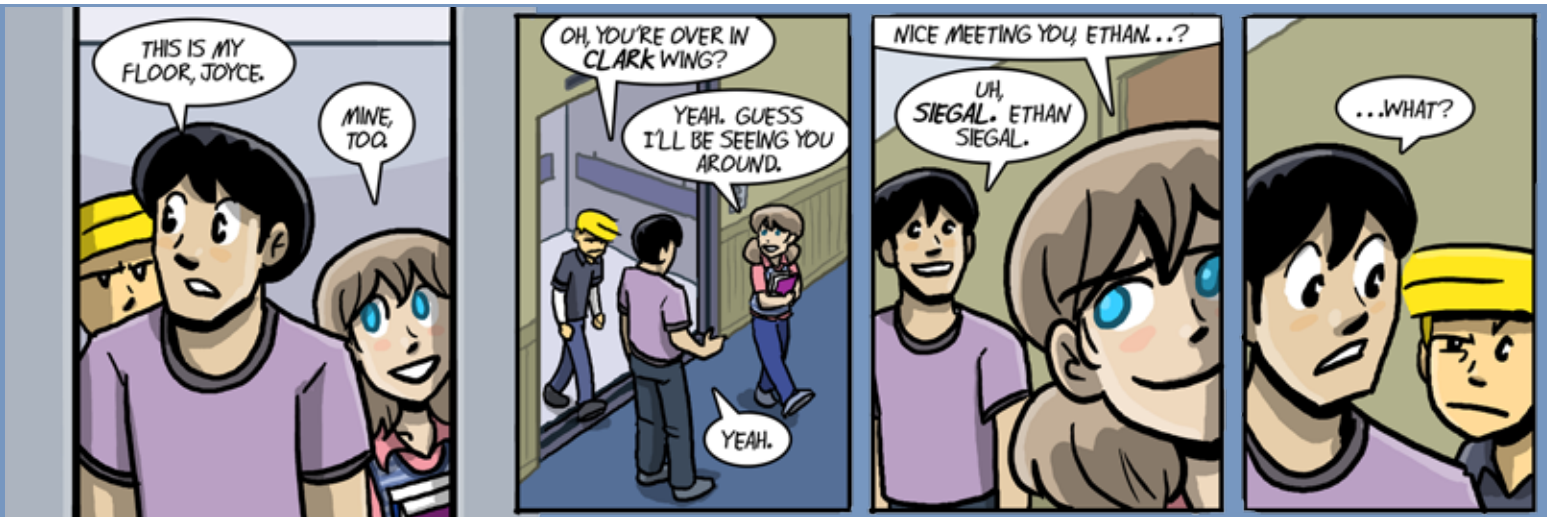


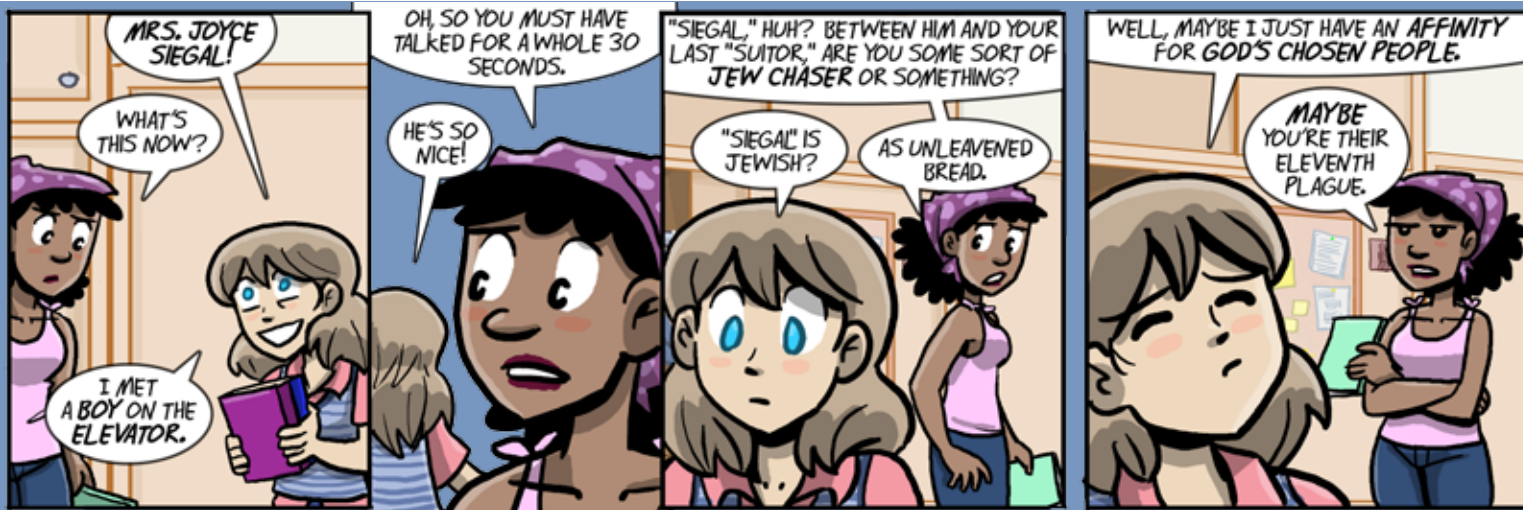






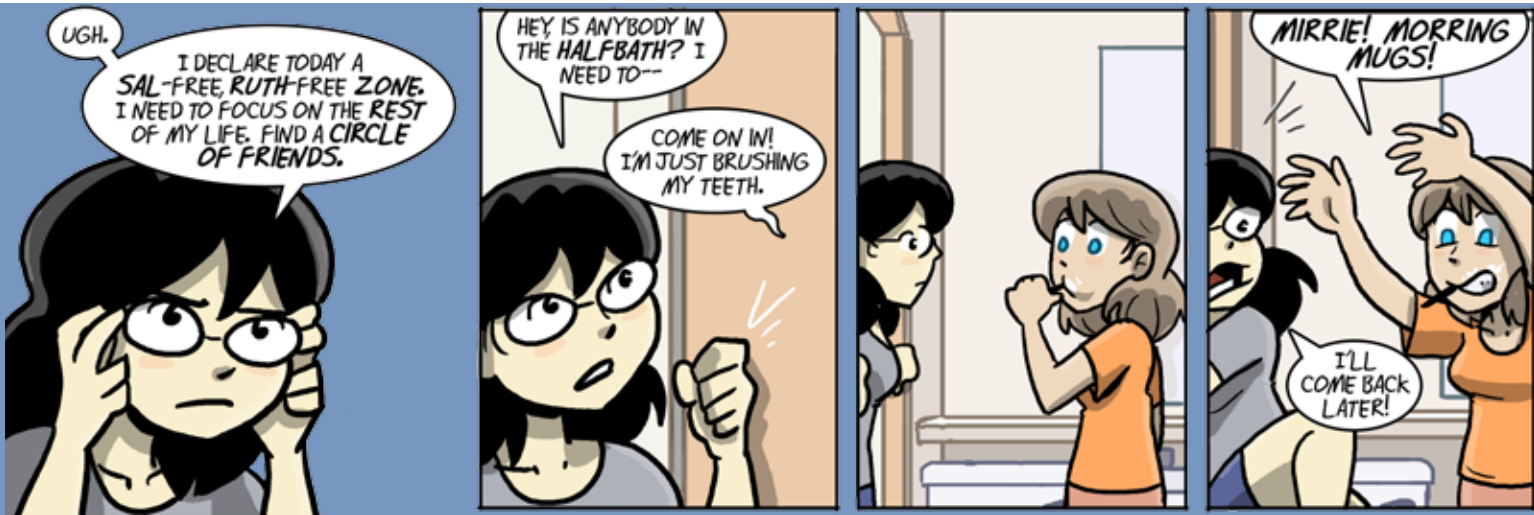
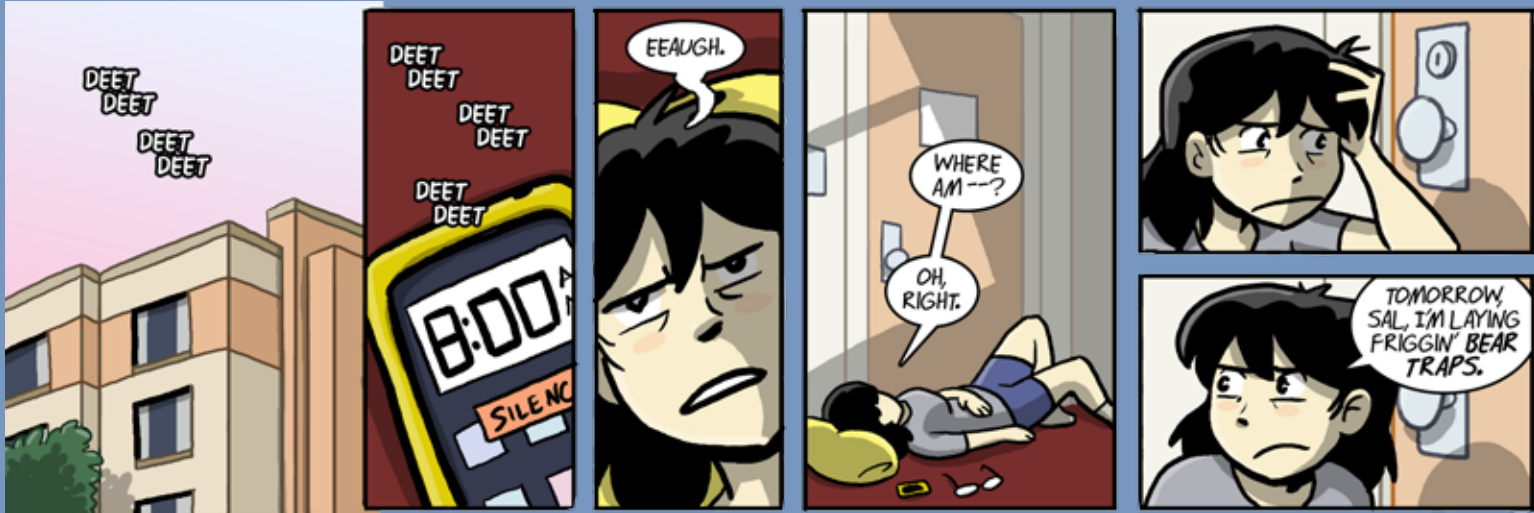
Have you been noticing that Mike's been placing books inside Walky's backpack in the background of a few strips?





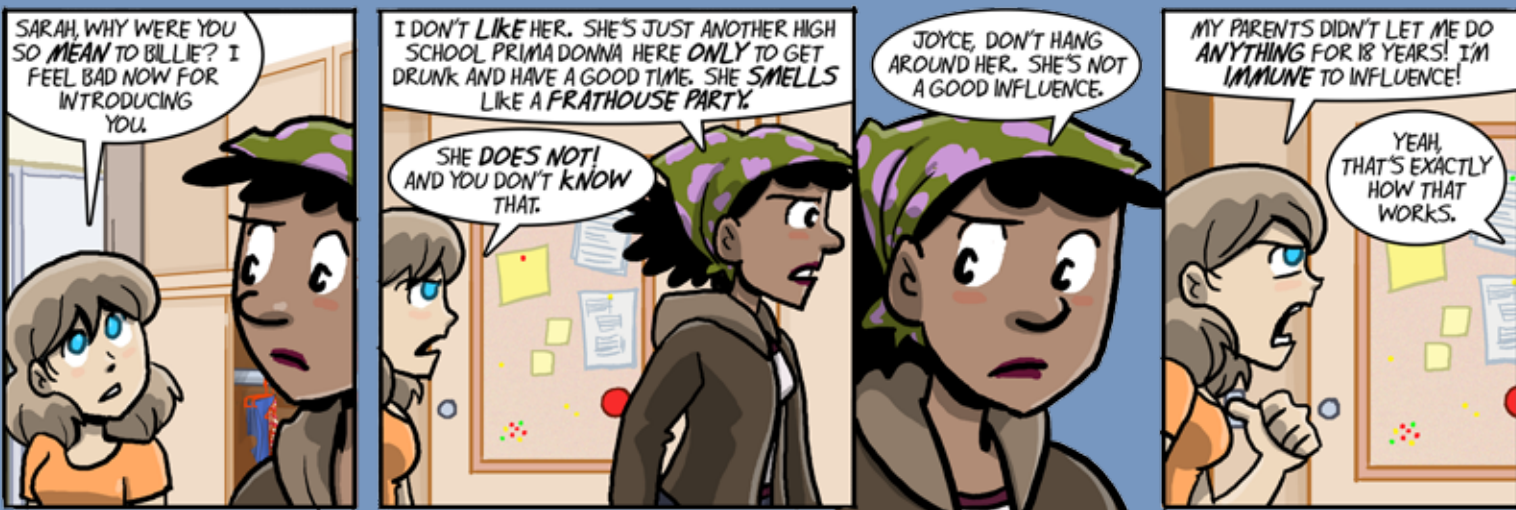
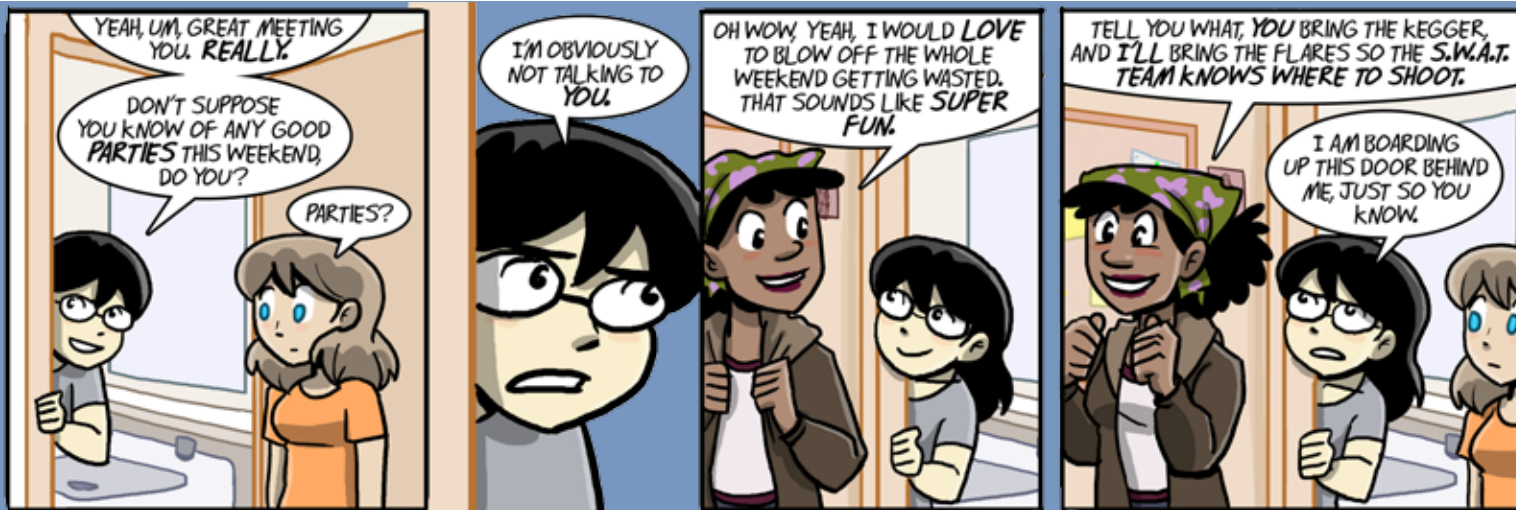
MEDIA RUMBLE





Joyce/Sarah and Billie/Sal's rooms are connected by a half-bath which the two rooms share. Some folks express skepticism when they learn this, but it's how Read Hall is set up in real life!





That is the principle upon which I was raised.

JENNIFER BILLINGSWORTH

Hometown: Evansville, Indiana

Major: Journalism

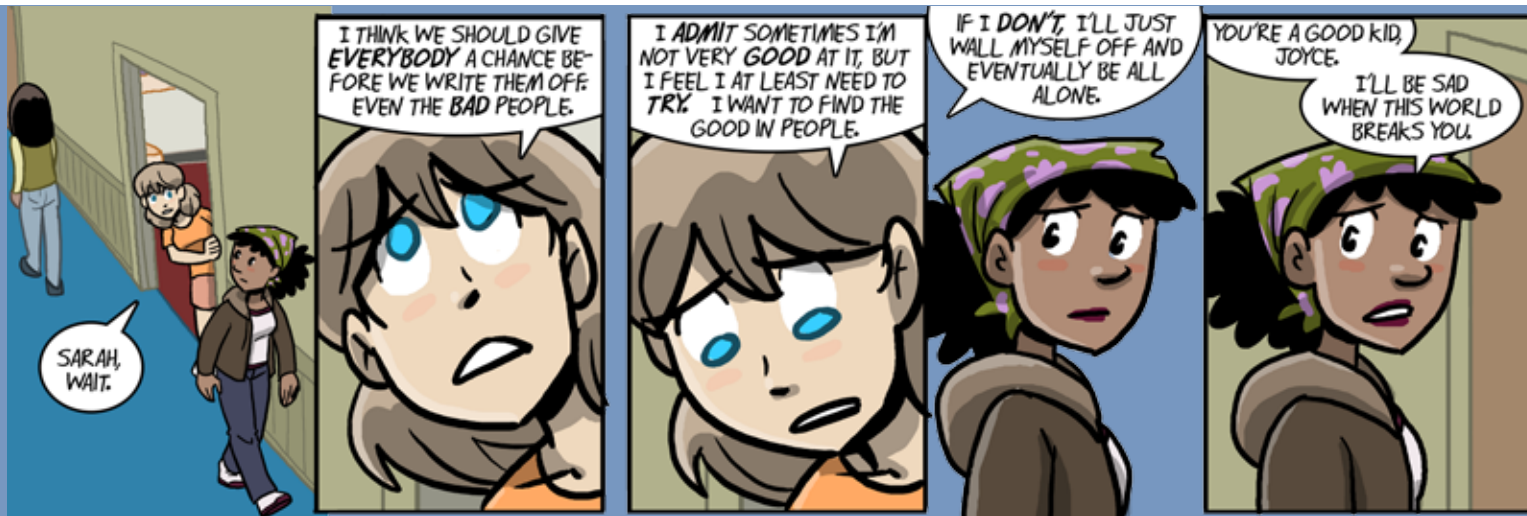
Likes: Alcohol, high school, cheerleading, football players, alcohol

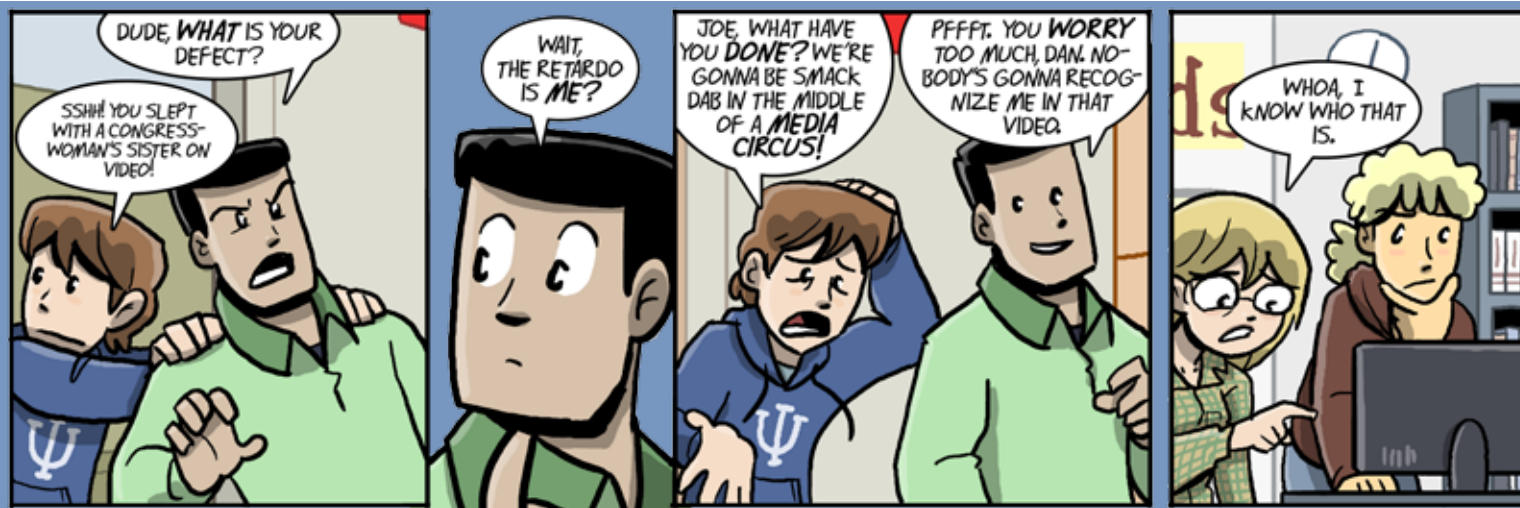
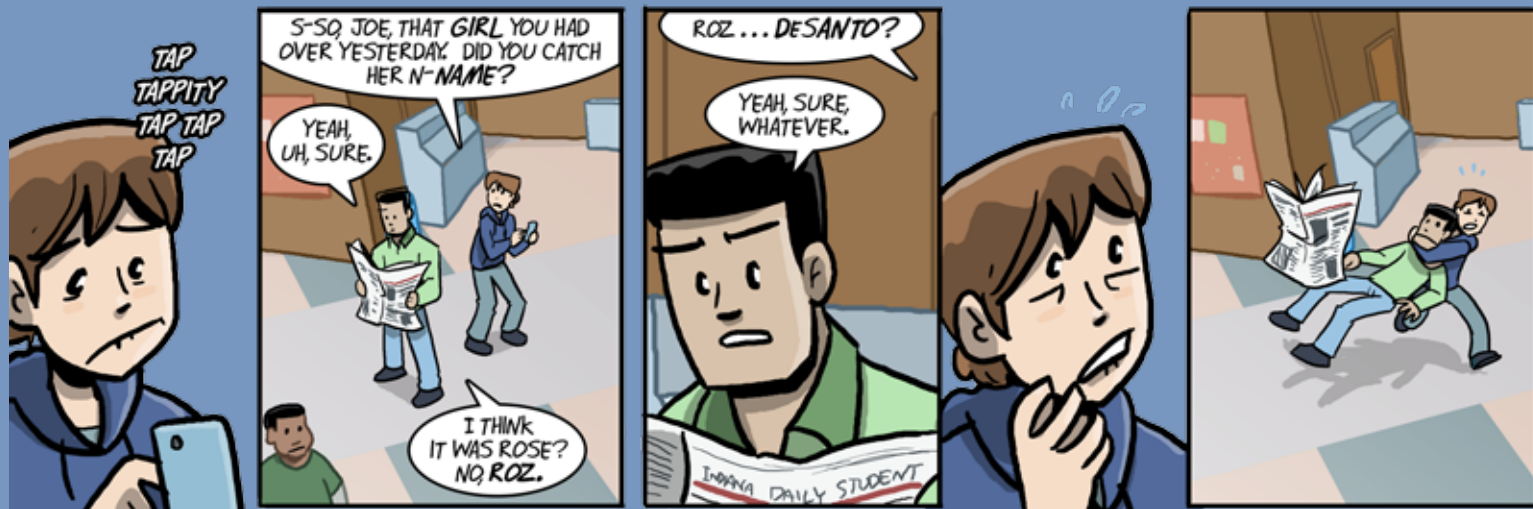
Back in high school, Billie was the editor of the school newspaper, the cheerleading captain, and the prom queen. In college, she's basically nothing. Well, she's an alcoholic. That's something.

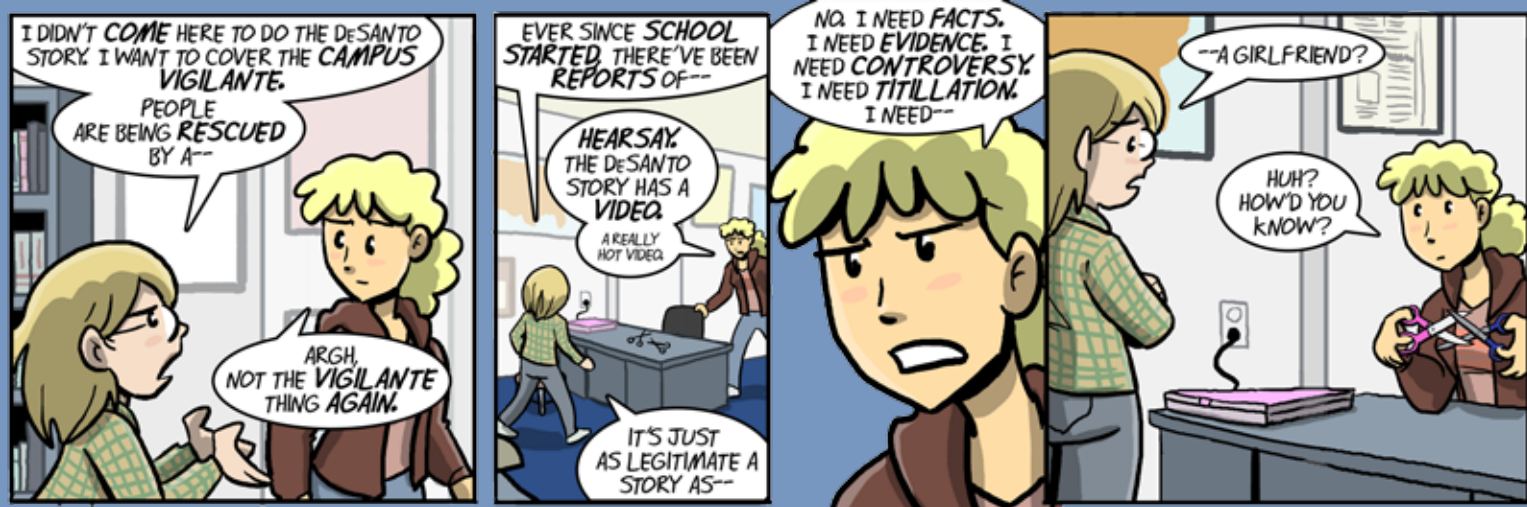
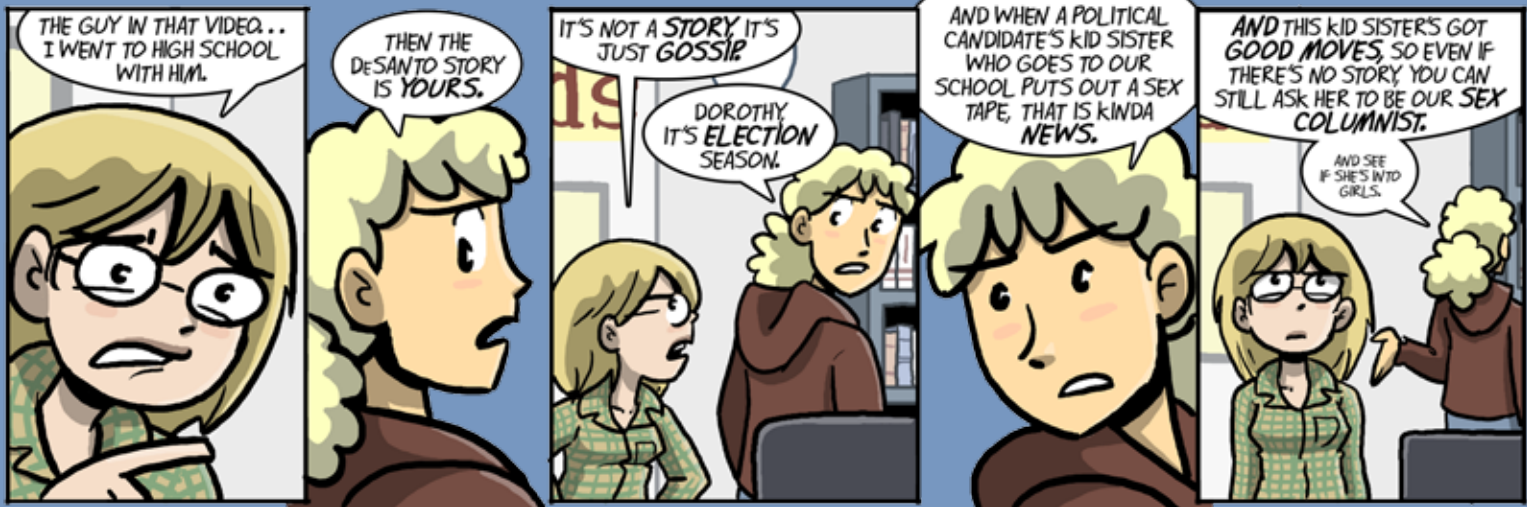
If you look like a step in the social ladder, Billie will be your best friend. If you look like a nerd, Billie will ignore your existence. She's not aware yet that things work a little differently outside of high school.

(Not VERY differently, but differently enough.)





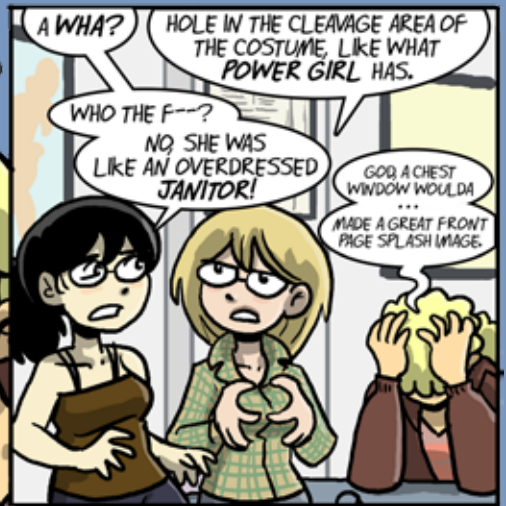




Drawing hands wielding scissors is a huge pain, but I firmly believe it was worth it.



I think Daisy just found a story hook!





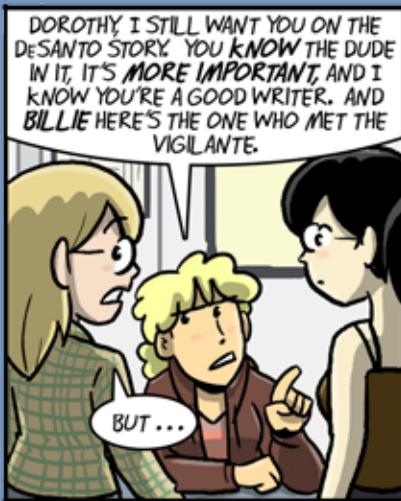
FIVE. WE'LL DO THE CAMPUS VIGILANTE STORY.

YES!



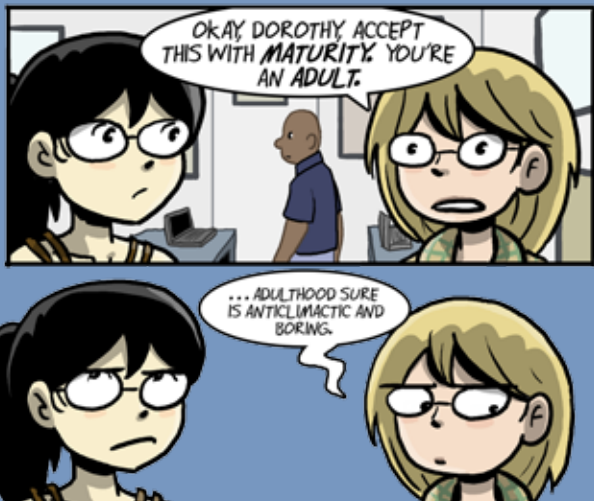
BILLIE, IS IT? YOU'RE IN CHARGE OF IT.

HEY!



DOROTHY, I STILL WANT YOU ON THE DeSANTO STORY. YOU KNOW THE DUDE IN IT, IT'S MORE IMPORTANT, AND I KNOW YOU'RE A GOOD WRITER. AND BILLIE HERE'S THE ONE WHO MET THE VIGILANTE.

BUT...



OKAY, DOROTHY, ACCEPT THIS WITH MATURITY. YOU'RE AN ADULT.

...ADULTHOOD SURE IS ANTICLIMACTIC AND BORING.



DON'T BE SHY. STOP STARING, GO OVER THERE, AND ASK HER OUT.

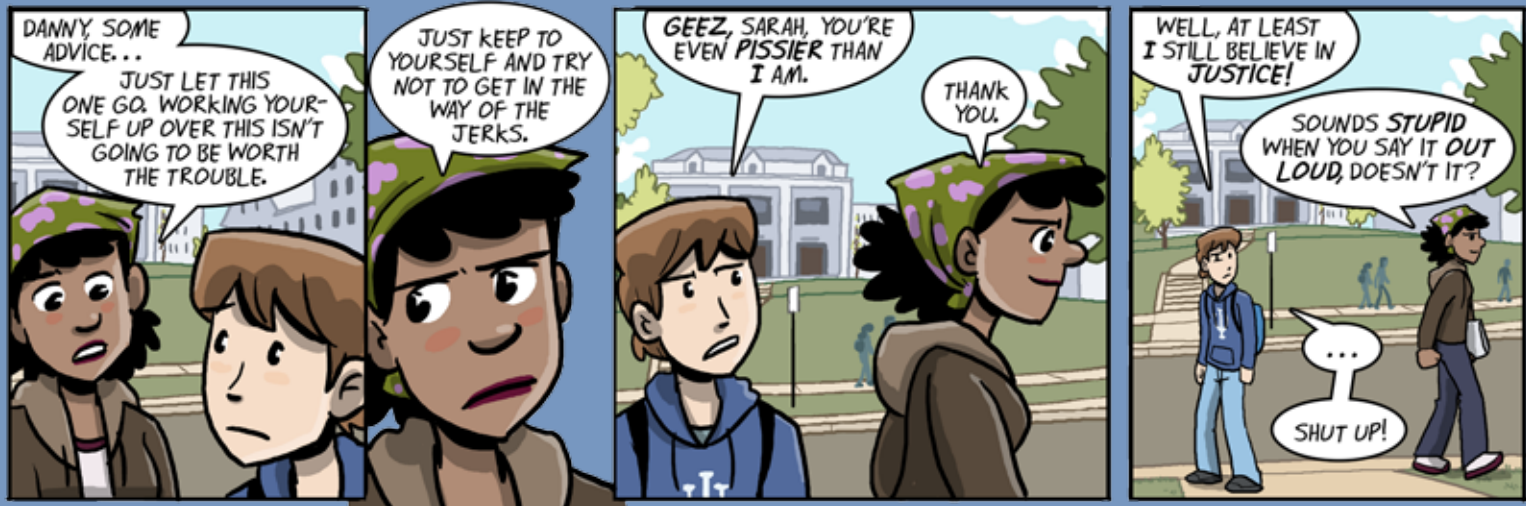


I DON'T LIKE HER! THAT WAS A DEATH STARE! A DEATH STARE! SHE SLEPT WITH JOE AND PUT IT ON THE INTERNET AND IT'S GONNA MAKE OUR LIVES HELL.



WAIT, THIS WAS YOUR JERK FRIEND? DID YOU THINK IT WAS MY BIRTHDAY?

LOOK, IF YOU'RE NOT GONNA DEATH STARE, GO AWAY.



See? More Sarah/Danny interaction. I told you!





This comic required the creepiest-looking dude possible, but I'd already created such an animal as an incidental character in *Shortpacked!*. So I just borrowed him.





Amber's only dated one gay dude, but, well, y'know, conversational English is what it is.

AMBER O'MALLEY

Hometown: Indianapolis, Indiana

Major: Computer Science

Likes: Tumblr, MMORPGs, Pokemon, Super Mario Bros, Transformers, boys who won't bang her

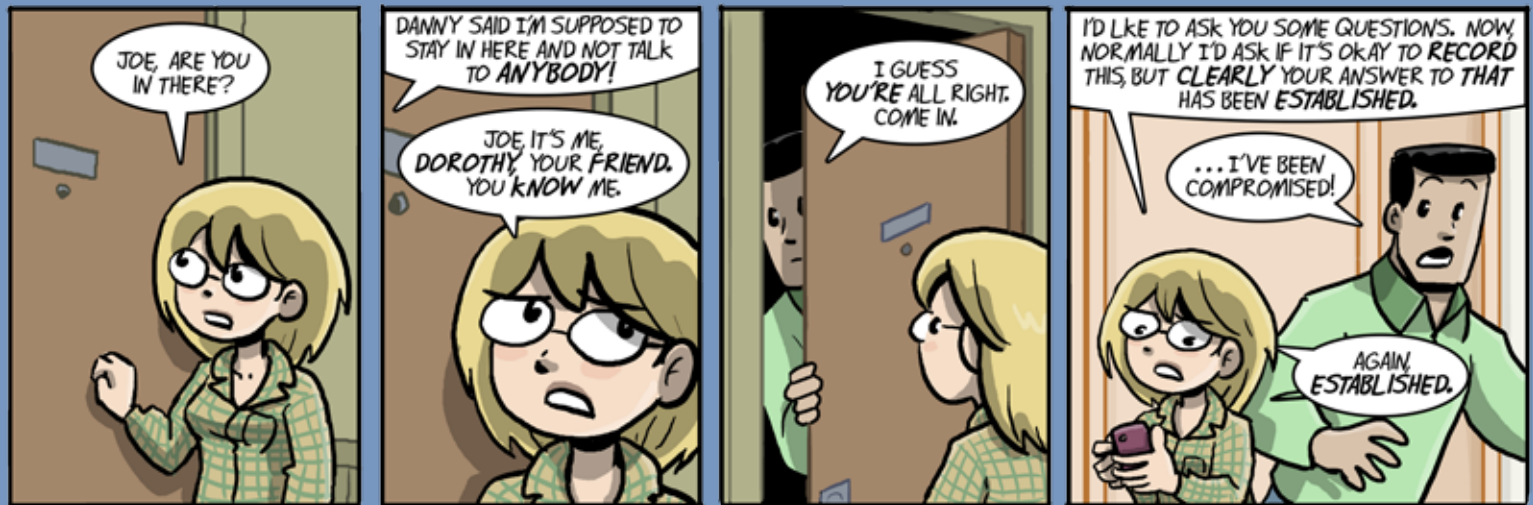
If Amber's high school friends Ethan and Mike didn't occasionally try to force her away from her MMORPGing, she probably wouldn't ever leave her dorm room. For all anyone knows, she never leaves it at all except to eat, hopefully shower, and go to class.

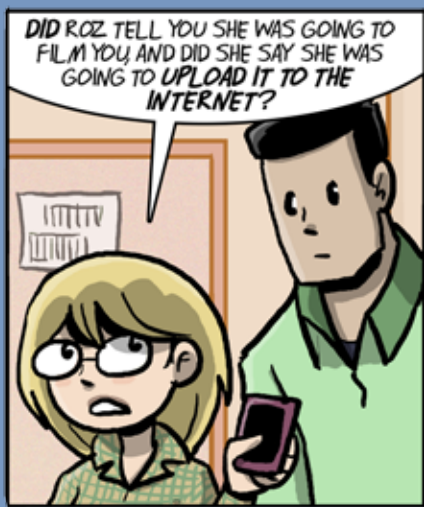
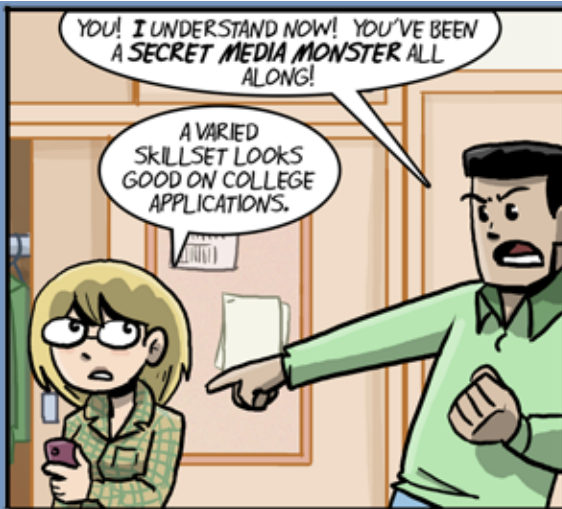
That said, she's surprisingly fit for someone who sits on the computer all day. Maybe she has a shake-weight or something.



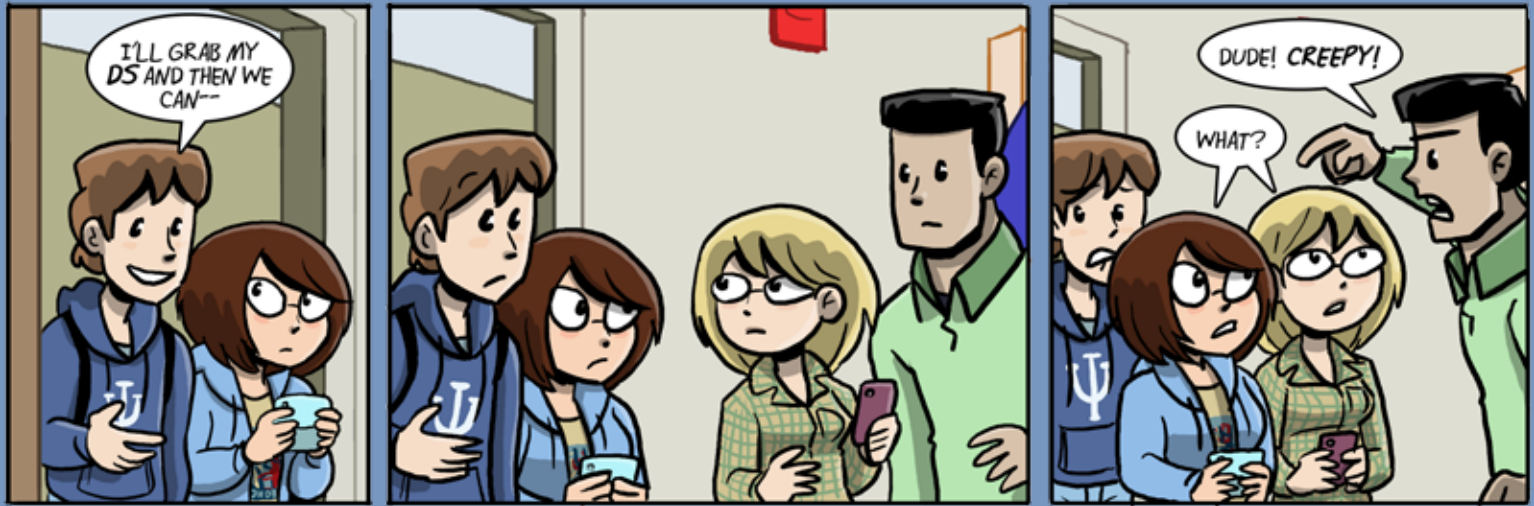


What? Dina, the girl with the dinosaur hat, is into dinosaurs? THE DEVIL YOU SAY



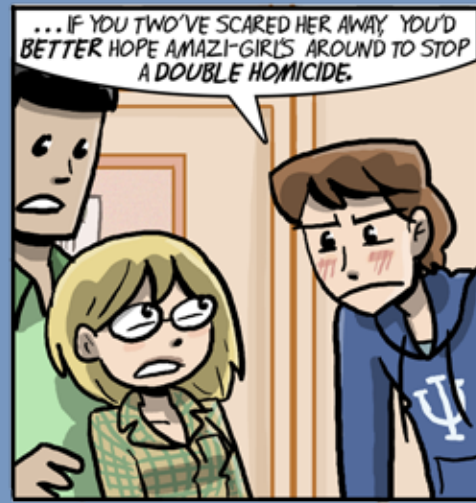


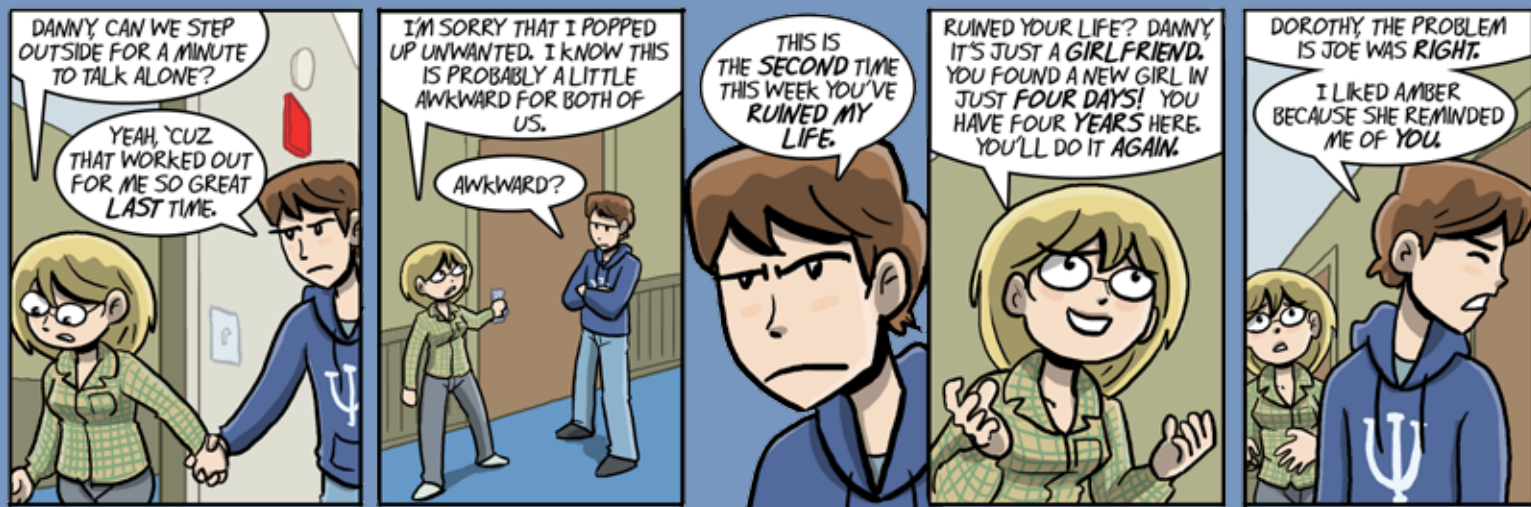
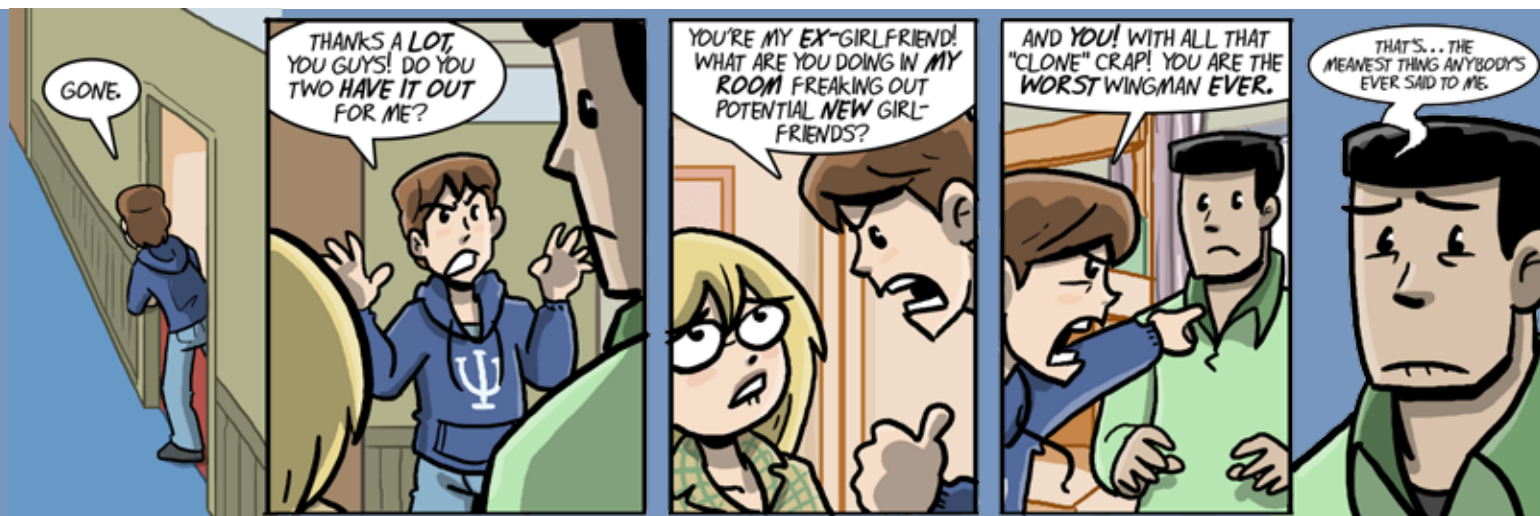
Lots of readers apparently missed this strip when they were attacking Roz later.



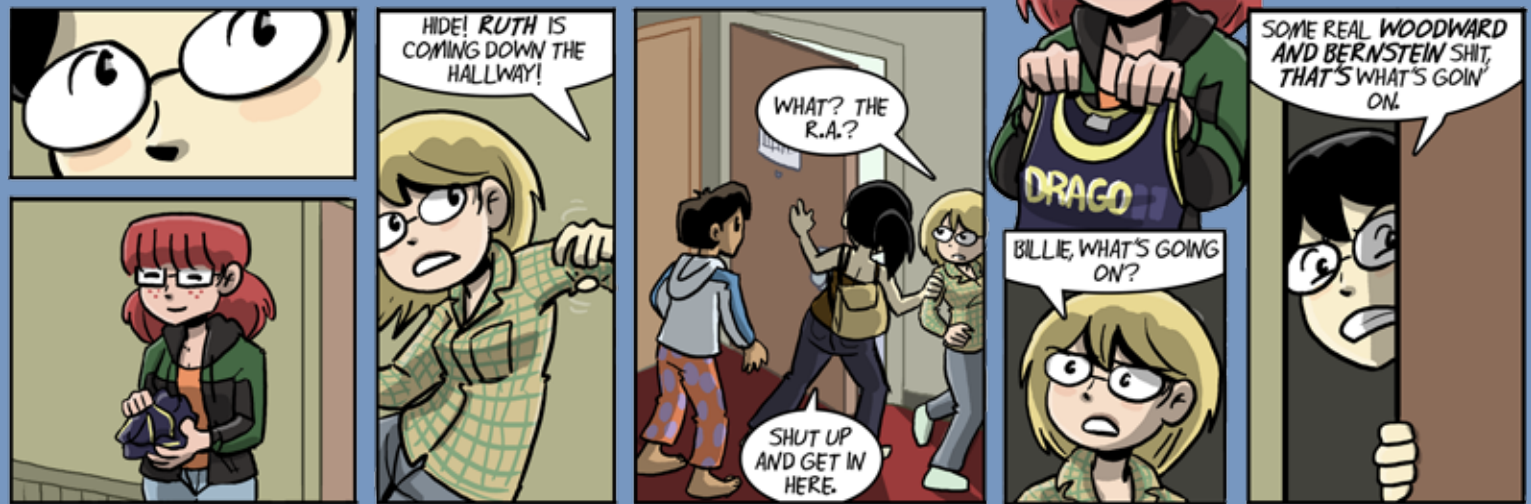
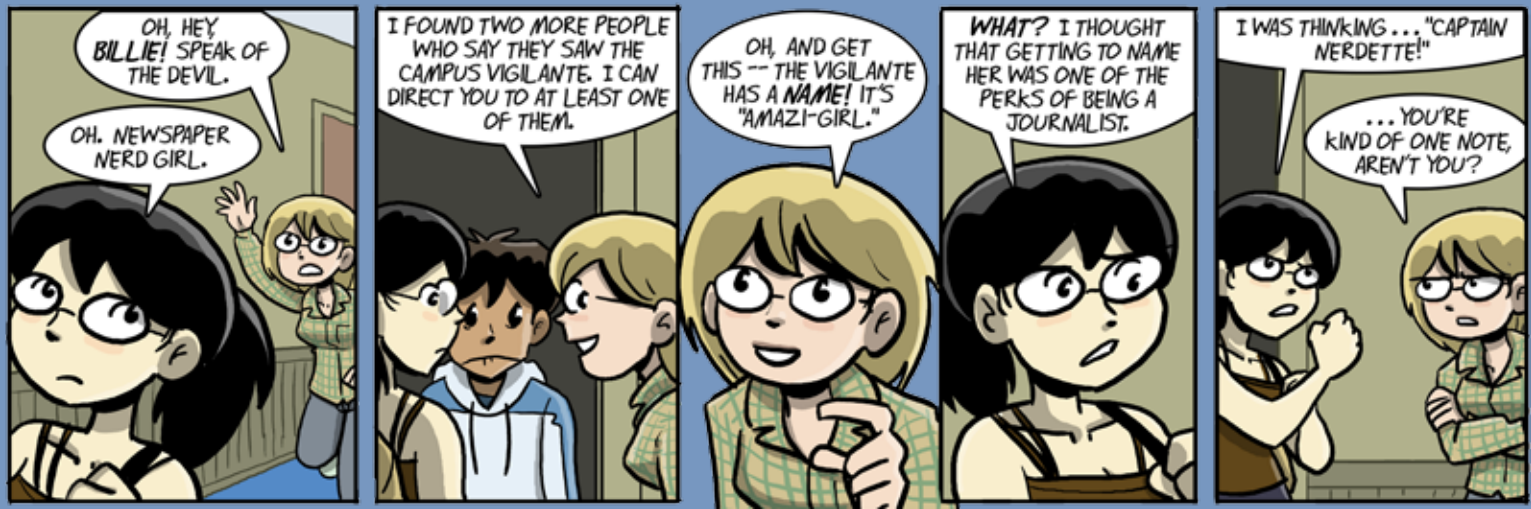
Oh, the elephant in the webcam-room.



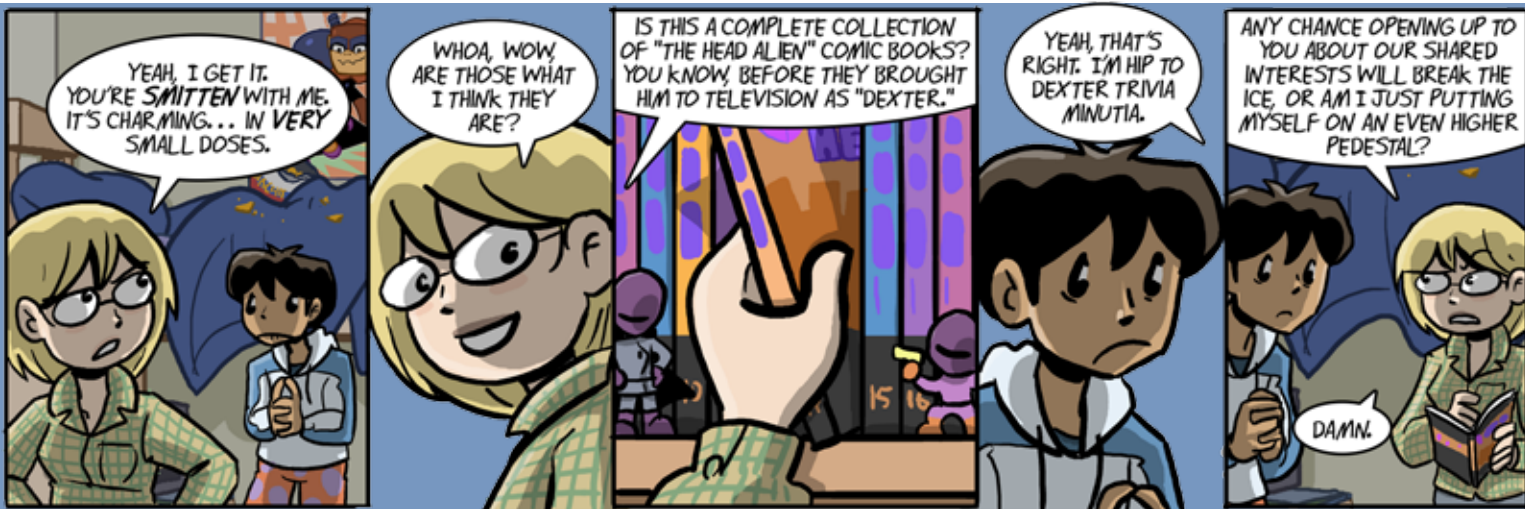
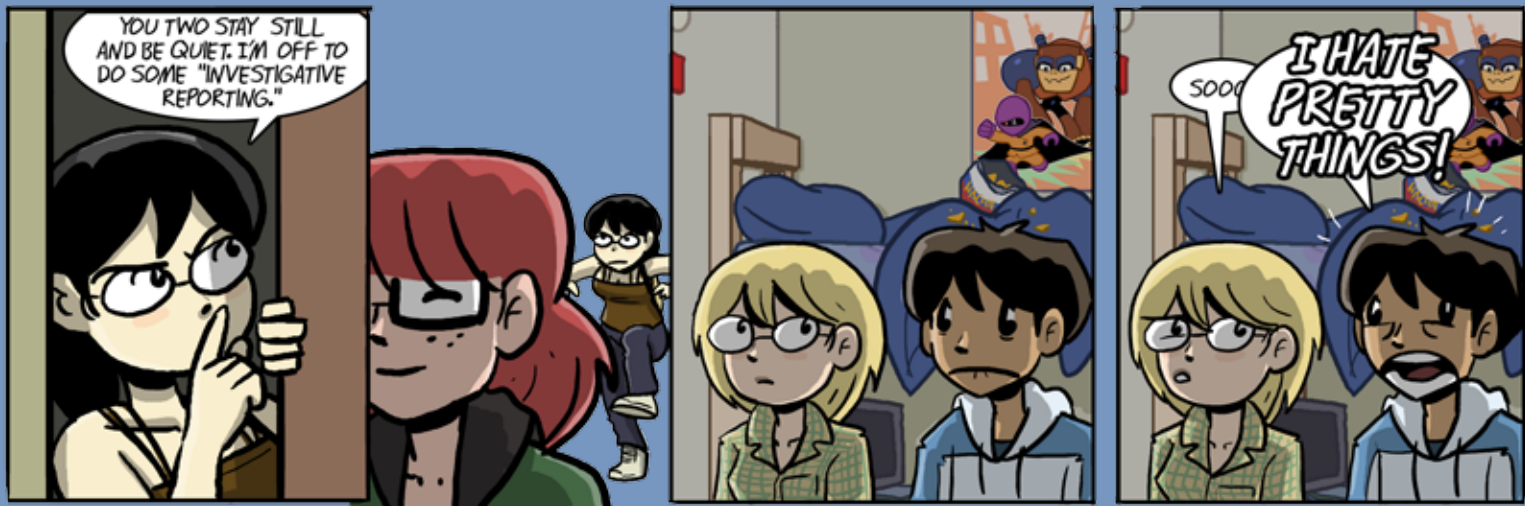




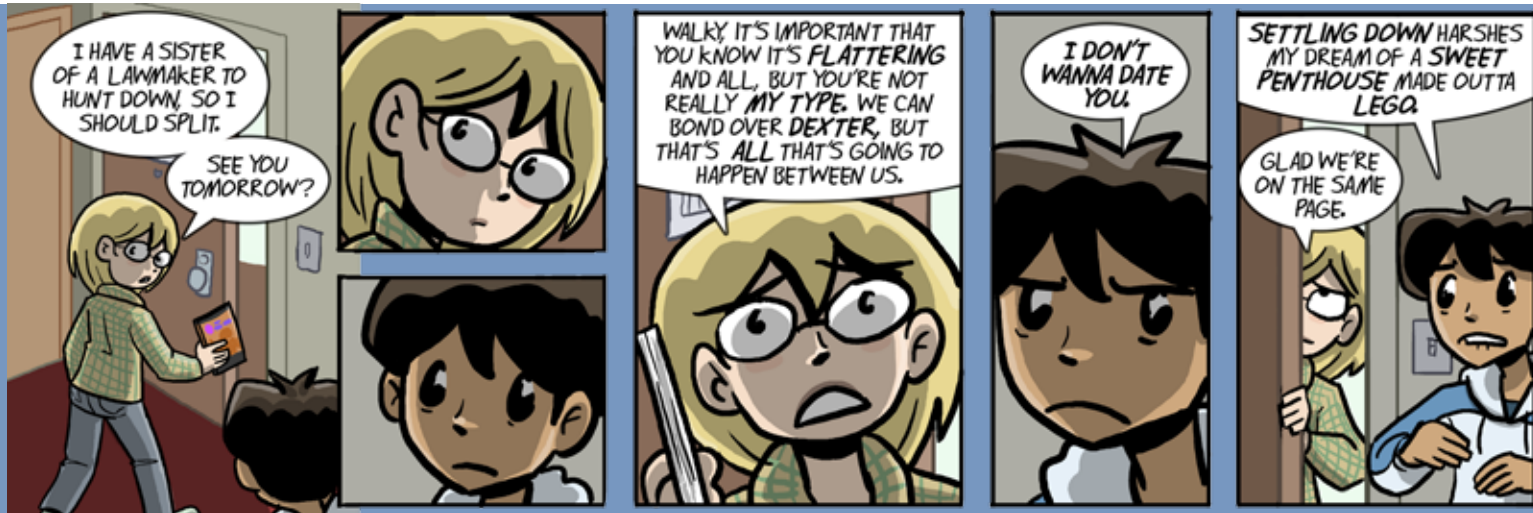
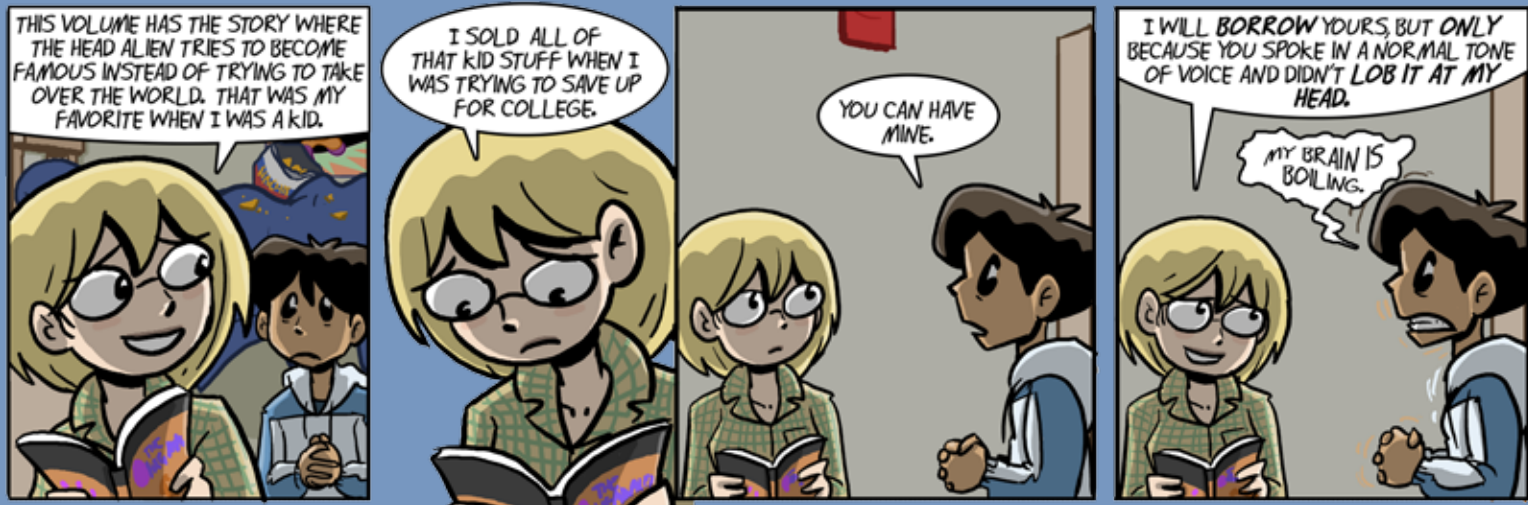




I wanted to do a pun on "Bernstein" that suggested Billie gets the journalist mixed up with the "Berenstein Bears," but I thought it was spelled "Bearnstein," and it's not, so the pun wouldn't work.



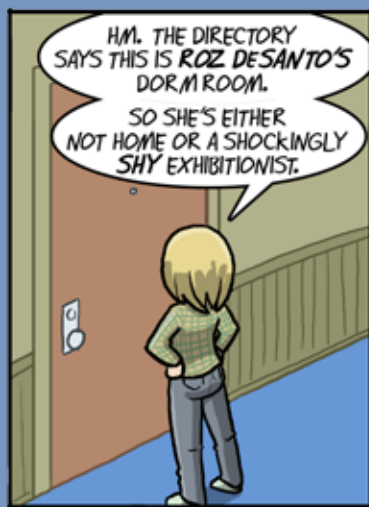
The name of the comic book artist who created Dexter and Monkey Master in this universe is "David Willis." It's true!



You should have seen the bachelor pads I designed for myself in elementary school. There were no stairs, only slides.

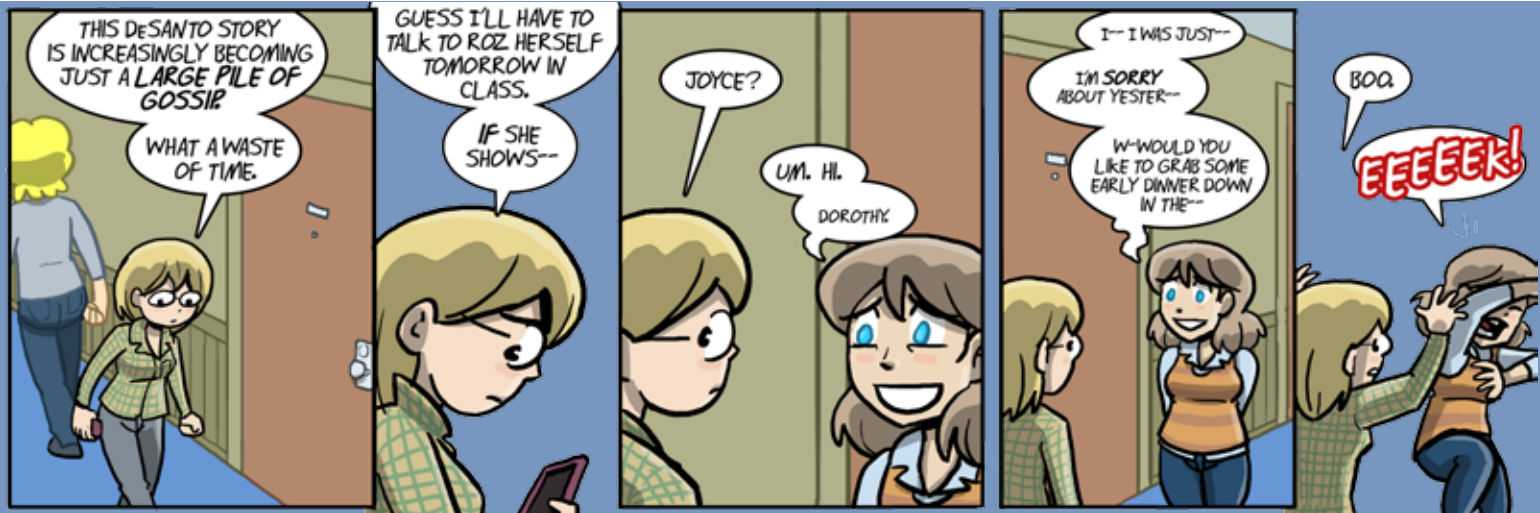


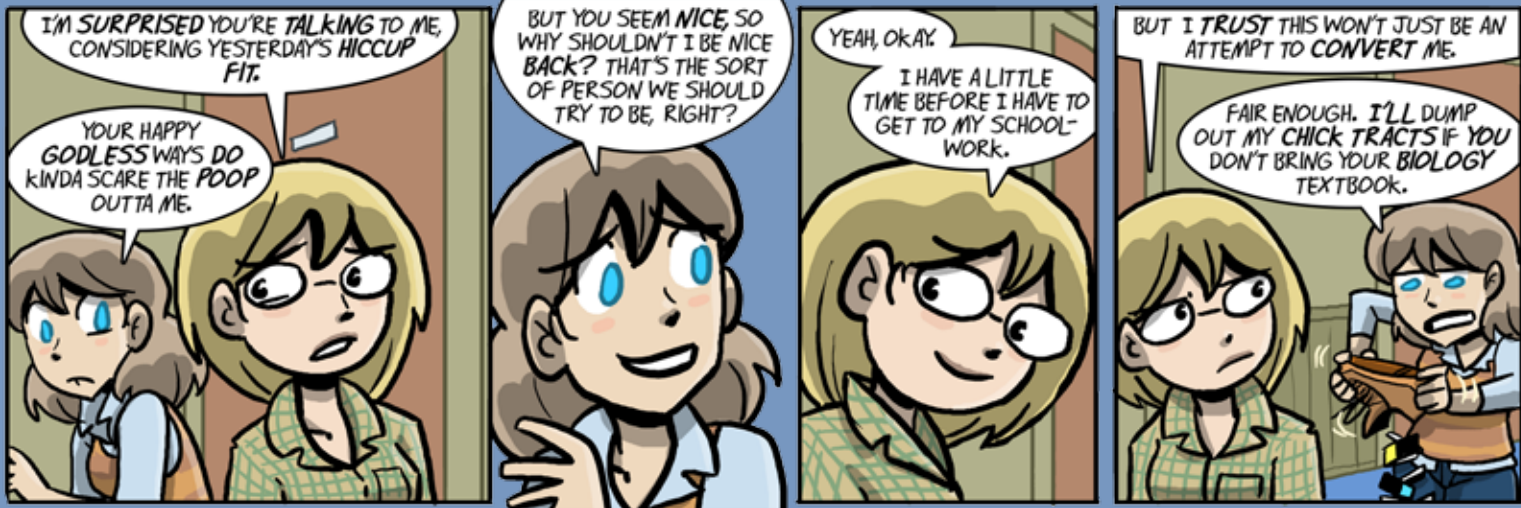




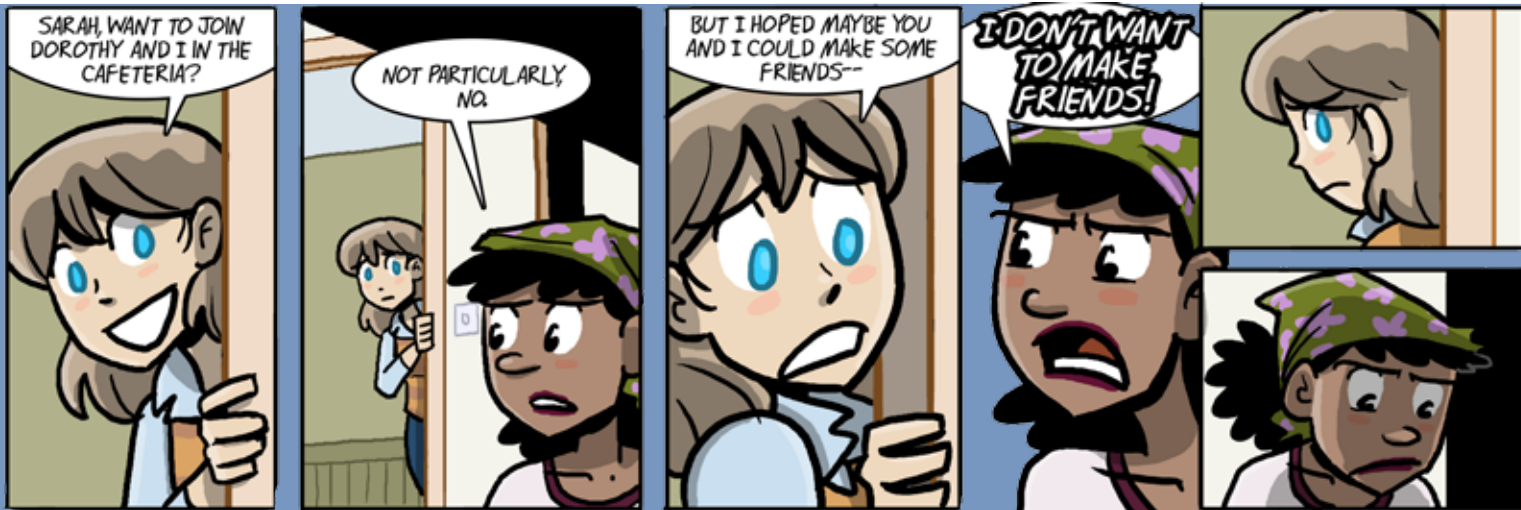


Mary's t-shirt says "STARVING" on it because she's an art major. Get it? Also, the punchline here kinda scratches the fourth wall a bit, if you think about it.





When I was a kid I didn't see anything wrong with the content of Chick Tracts. They don't hold up well to moral or factual scrutiny, but that scrutiny was never applied. Why would it be? They were Christian, the end.



**YESTERDAY WAS
THURSDAY**









YOU SHOULDN'T SLEEP IN YOUR DAY-CLOTHES, Y'KNOW. IT MAKES 'EM RATTY.

I'LL KEEP THAT IN MIND.



I LIKE THIS! BACK HOME IT WAS ALWAYS MY JOB TO WAKE UP MY OLDER BROTHERS.

WE'RE LIKE A FAMILY.



AND SEE? NOW YOU WON'T MISS CLASS AGAIN 'CUZ YOU SLEPT THROUGH IT. ISN'T THAT NICE?

THANKS.



OH! OH **MAN!** WE SHOULD GET READY FOR CLASS **TOGETHER!** WE CAN BE **SHOWER BUDDIES!**

NEVER UTTER THAT PHRASE EVER AGAIN.



SHOULDN'T YOU BE HANGING OUT WITH YOUR ROOMMATE INSTEAD OF ME?

SARAH? LORD KNOWS I TRIED!



SHE'S ALWAYS PUSHING EVERYONE AWAY. IT MAKES ME SAD BECAUSE I WAS **REALLY** HOPING THAT I'D GET TO BE GOOD FRIENDS WITH MY COLLEGE ROOMMATE.



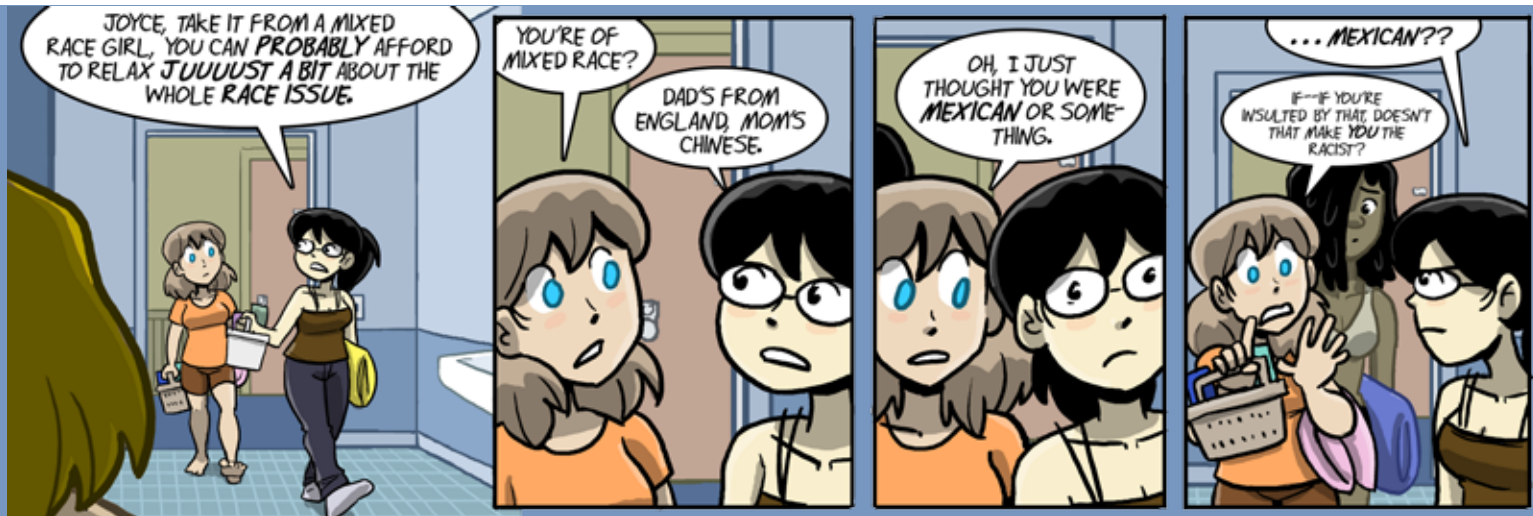
I HAVE LOTS OF BROTHERS BUT NOT A SISTER, RIGHT? I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO HAVE A SISTER. TO BE **SISTERS.**



WAIT, IS IT **RACIST** TO SAY "SISTER"? I DIDN'T MEAN IT IN THE **BLACK** WAY! ... NOT THAT **THAT** IS A **BAD** KIND OF SISTER! OH MY GOSH, WAS I BEING **OFFENSIVE?**

WOW.

I AM NOT ACCUSTOMED TO DIVERSITY.



We'll learn in *Dumbing of Age* book 2 that the girl behind Joyce and Billie in the last panel is Dorothy's roommate!



Shower drain hair was the bane of my college existence. And now that I live with a girl, it hasn't gotten much better. For a short while I lived with two girls and that was just *oh my god no*.

JESUS, JOYCE, YOU SAID YOU HAD HOW MANY BROTHERS? HOW IS HAIR IN THE SHOWER NEW TO YOU?



I'M THE LITTLE GIRL! I GOT MY OWN BATHROOM!



AND IT'S NOT JUST HAIR! IT'S ALSO LITTLE TINY CLUMPS OF USED SOAP! THAT STUFF TOUCHED PEOPLE.



NO ONE ON THIS FLOOR IS AS BIG A GIRL AS YOU

LOOK AT THIS, MIKE. SOMEBODY'S GOT FRIGGIN' WEINER MANGE.



INDIANA DAILY STUDENT
DESANTO BOY TOY SPEAKS OUT
"It's an open relationship, ladies," says IU freshman
by DOROTHY KEENER
OPPONENT DECLAIMS VIDEO





DANNY WILCOX

Hometown: Mishawaka, Indiana

Major: Computer Science

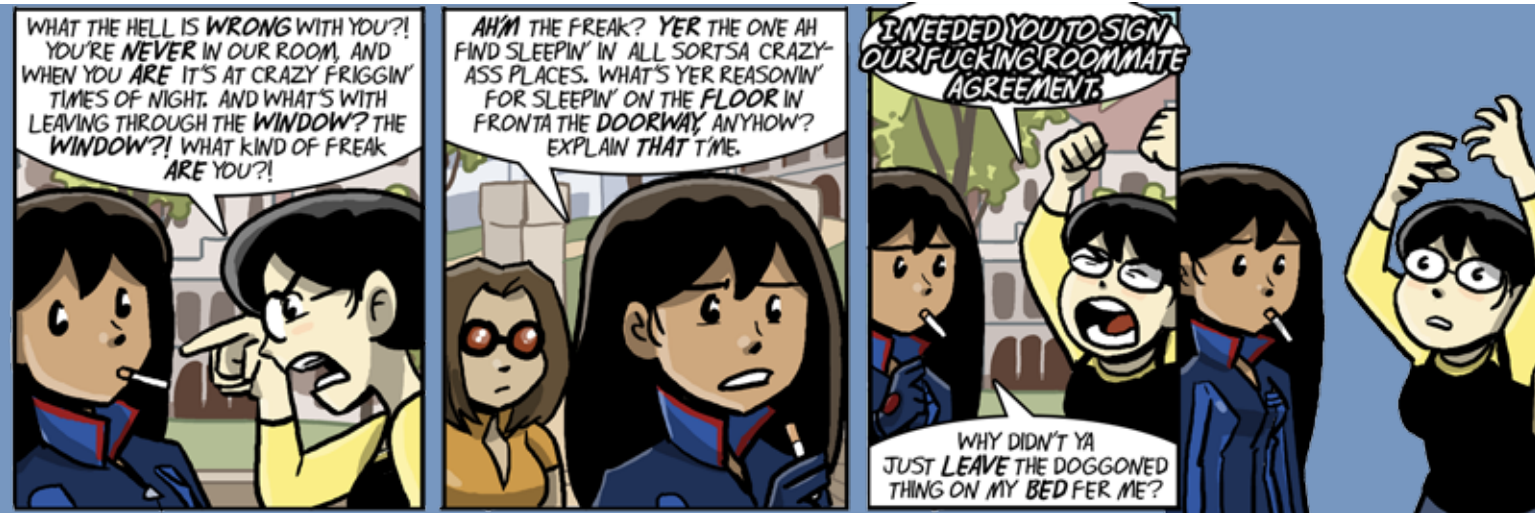
Likes: Reliability, long-term romantic commitment, Pokemon, girls with glasses

While his lifelong friend and roommate Joe enjoys random sexual encounters, Danny is serially monogamous. He was all set to eventually marry his first girlfriend, Dorothy, before she dumped him, and that's kind of wrecked his worldview. Hopefully he'll find a second first girlfriend to dote over.

Danny's not terribly fond of hijinks. Which is weird, because he keeps hanging around with Joe. You think he'd rather go find a good closet to hide in.

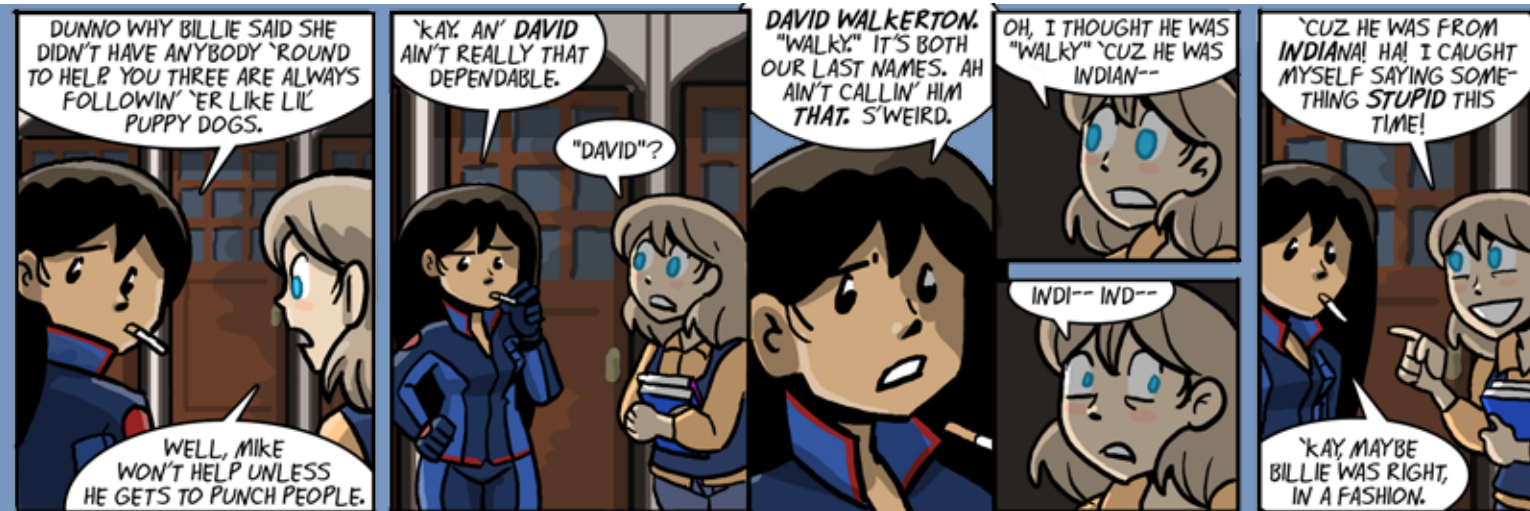


The girl in orange is Marcie! She's mute, in case you couldn't guess from the sign language. She's saying "yes" and "crazy" respectively in the first and third panels.



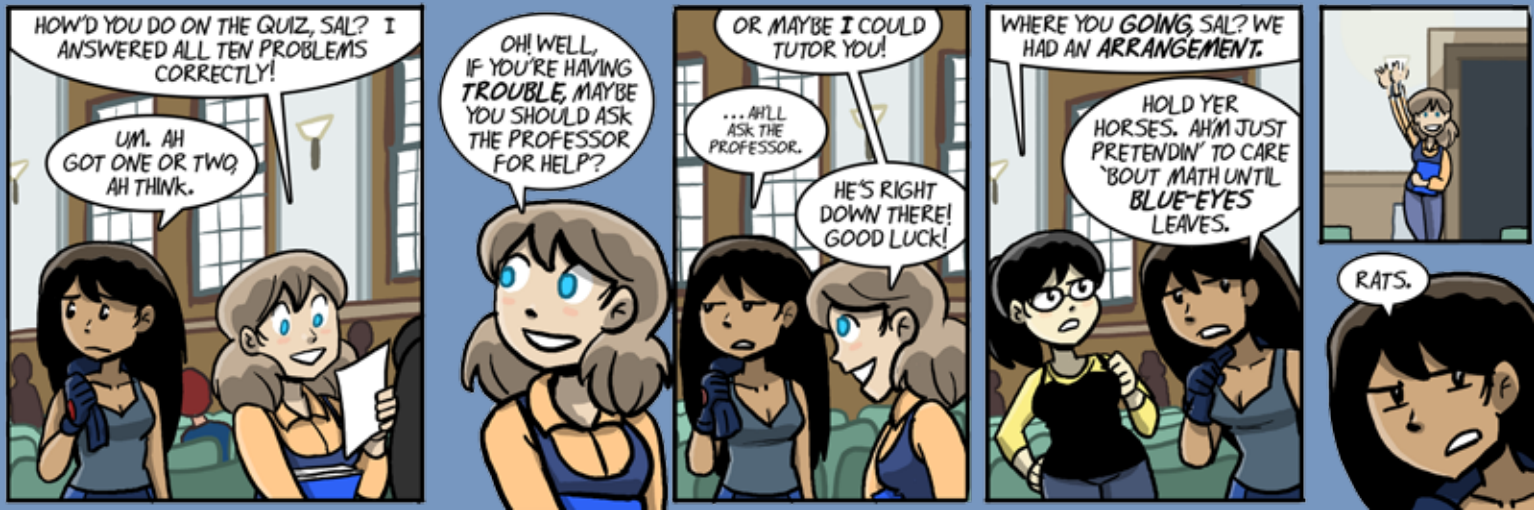


"Help" and "We'll see" respectively in panels one and four.



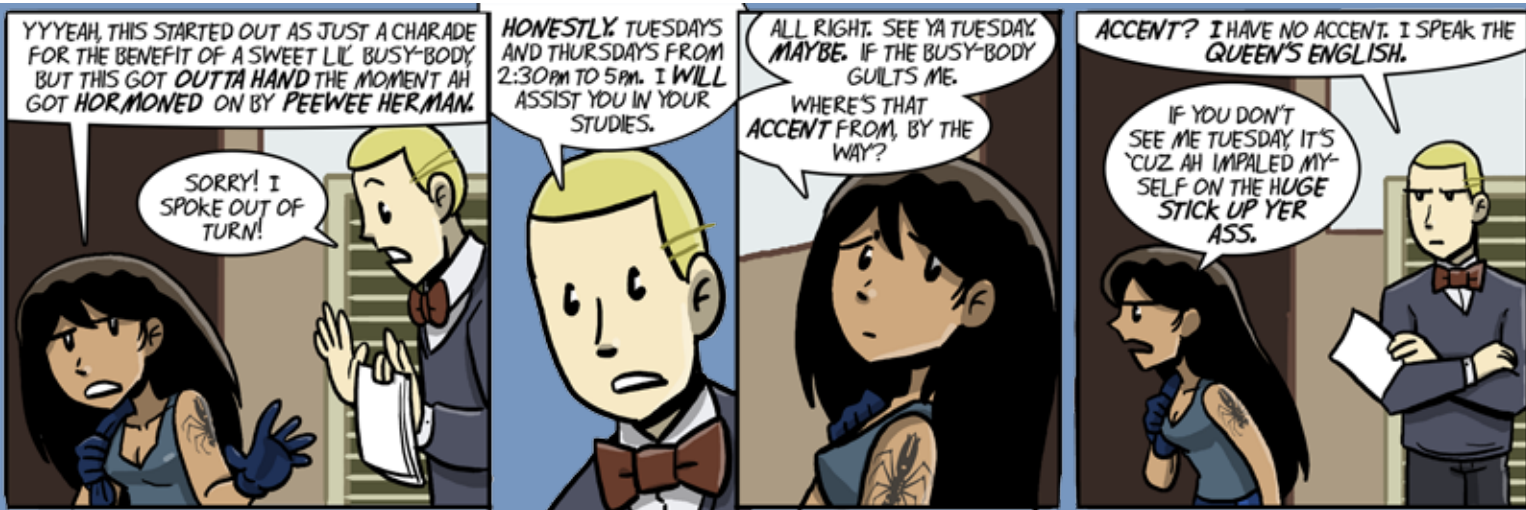


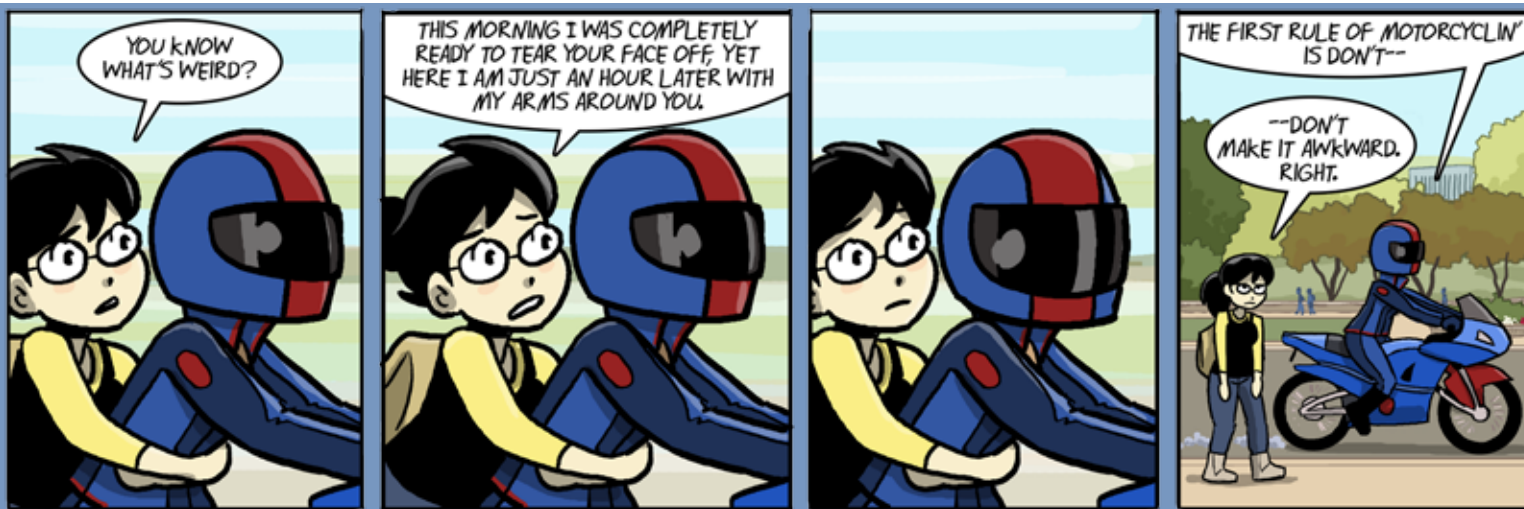
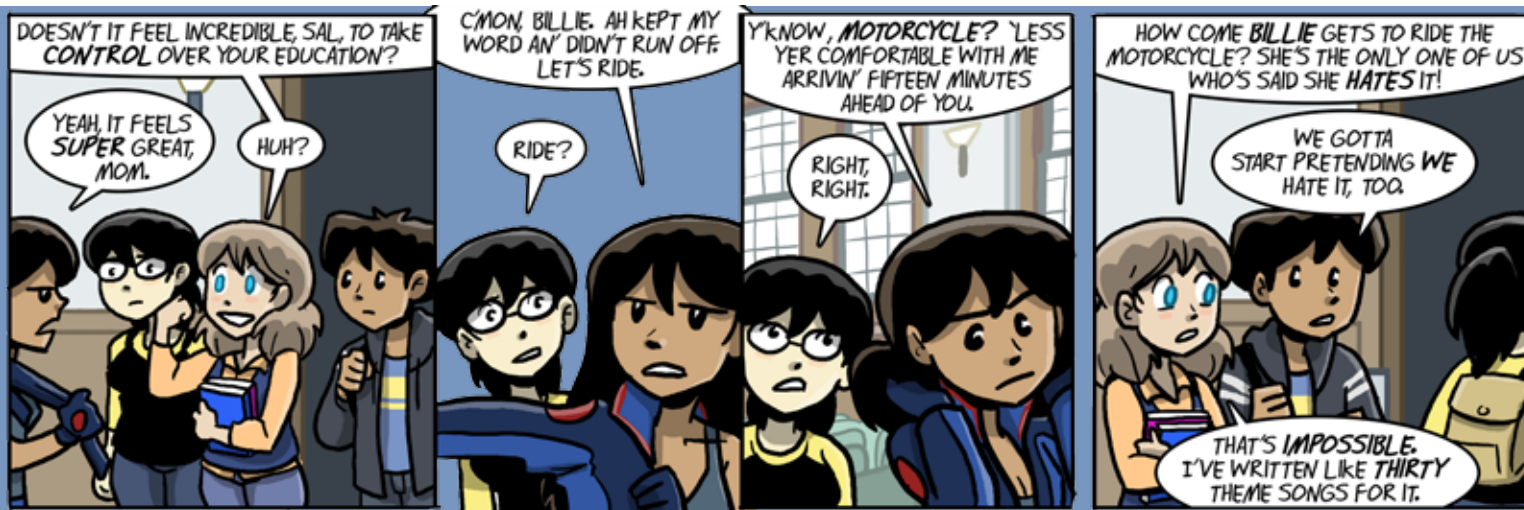
The name of Sarah's nemesis is Raidah. I don't think that's been revealed in the strip itself yet.

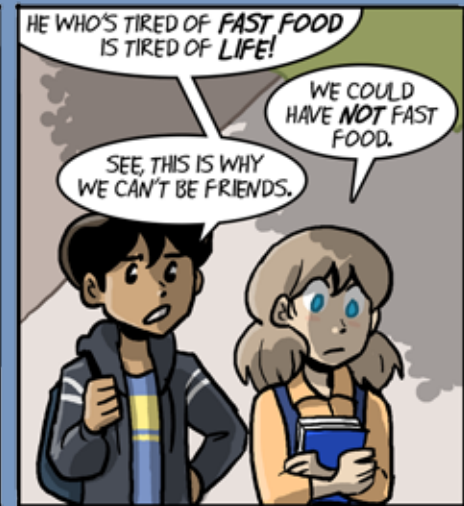
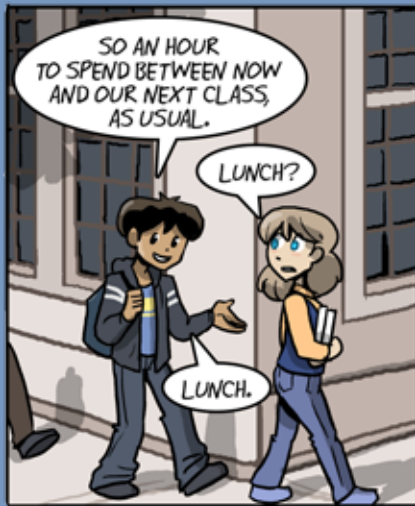




Some day we will see the face of Professor Rees. Probably.







Hmm, what's up with Amber here?



SAL WALKERTON

Hometown: Evansville, Indiana

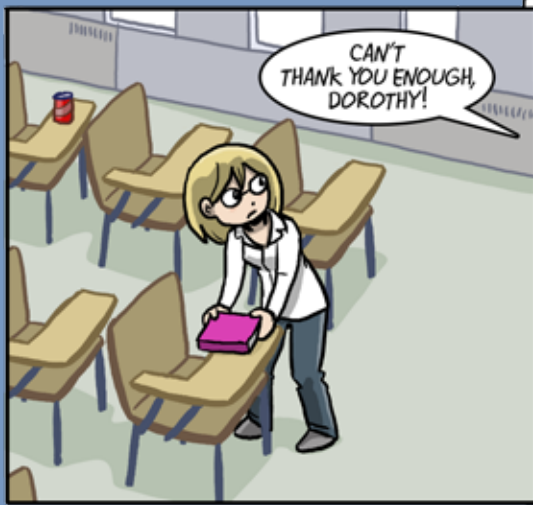
Major: Undeclared

Likes: Antiestablishmentarianism

After Walky's twin sister Sal held up two convenience stores, she was sent by her parents to a Catholic boarding school in Tennessee. Instead of being rehabilitated and finding Jesus, for some reason she came back a smoking, tattooed, motorcycle-riding rebel. How does this happen???

Sal's mood maintains a steady cool that can't be shaken even by the strongest displays of authority. Though she avoids most social contact and has few friends, she attracts a sea of admirers. This annoys her.





WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "THE ANSWER YOU WANTED TO HEAR"?



I'M YOUNG, BUT I'M SMART ENOUGH TO KNOW I CAN'T TRUST THE MEDIA TO GET MY STORY RIGHT. AND I DON'T TRUST YOU.



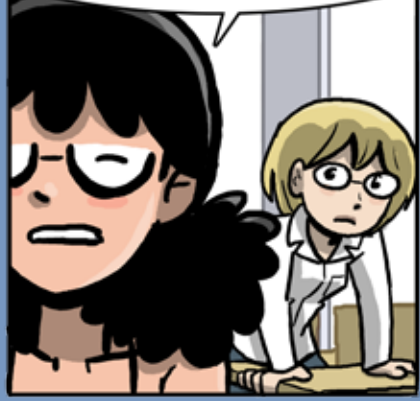
TRY ME.

DID YOU JUDGE ME?



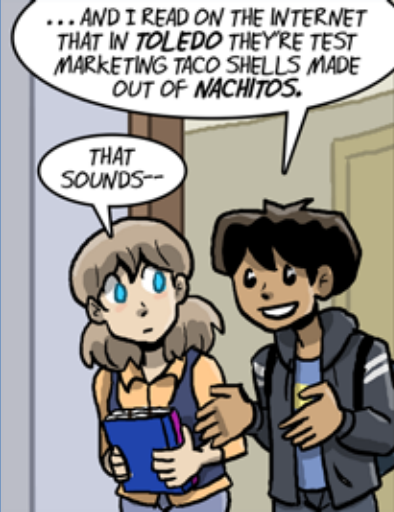
YOU PUT UP A SEX VIDEO. WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I THINK THAT WHILE YOU'RE NOT INTERVIEWING ME, MAYBE YOU SHOULD THINK A LITTLE HARDER ABOUT WHAT ALL THIS MIGHT BE ABOUT.



... AND I READ ON THE INTERNET THAT IN TOLEDO THEY'RE TEST MARKETING TACO SHELLS MADE OUT OF NACHITOS.

THAT SOUNDS--



PREMARITAL HANKY-PANKY.

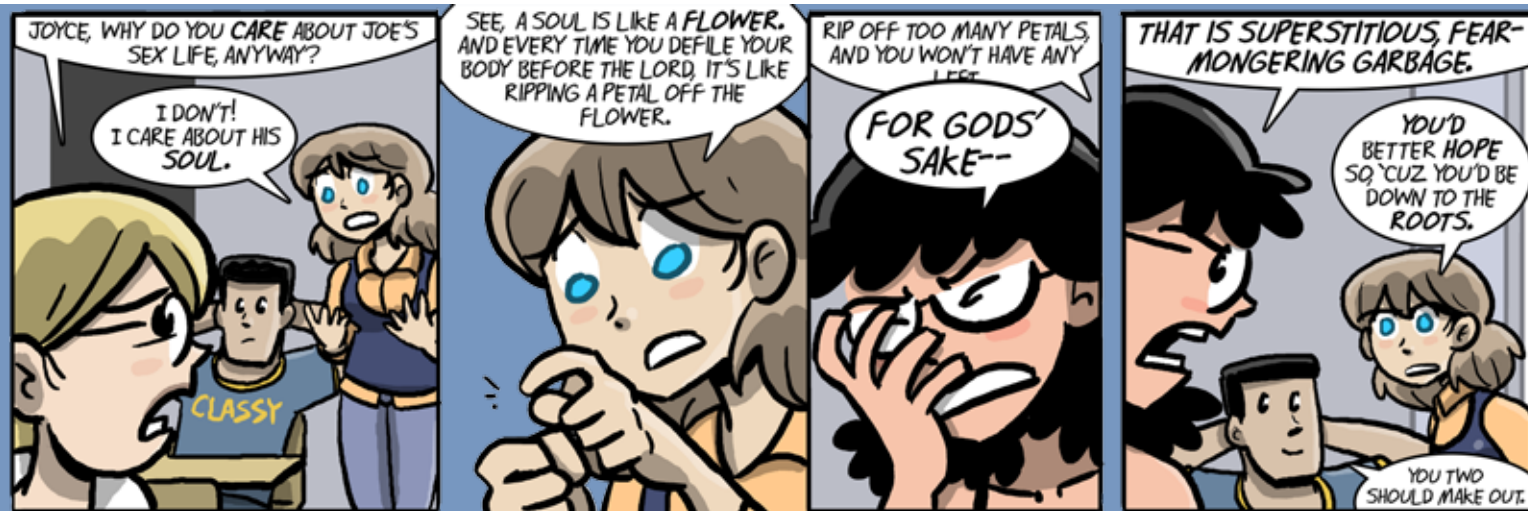
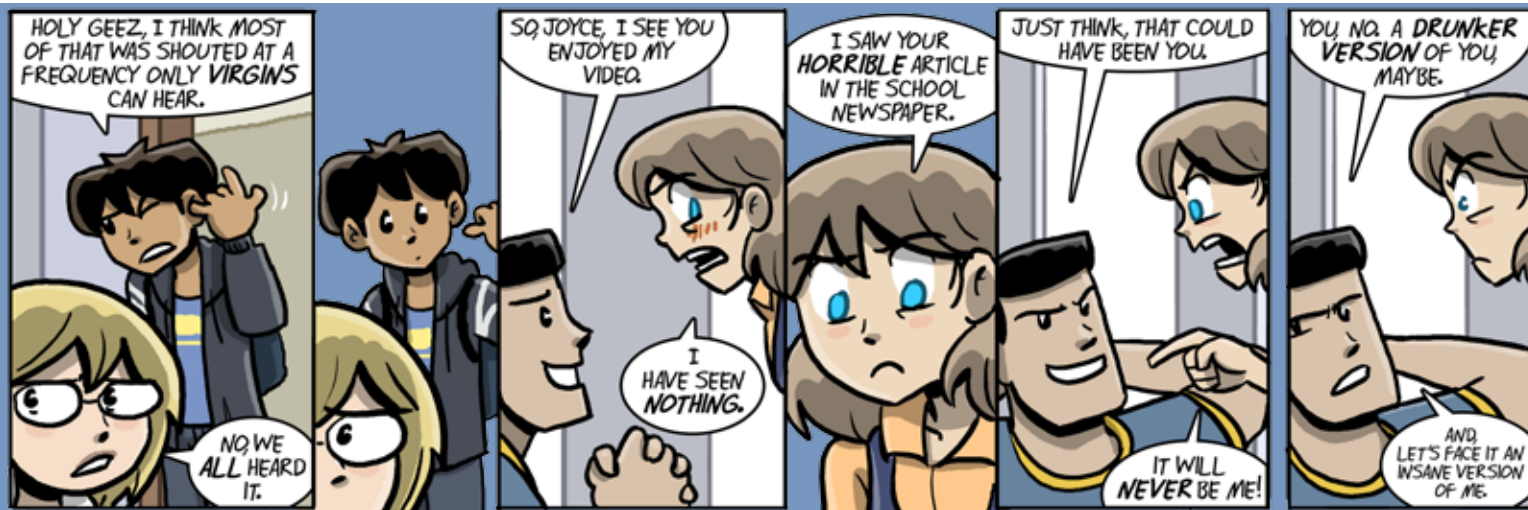
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU--



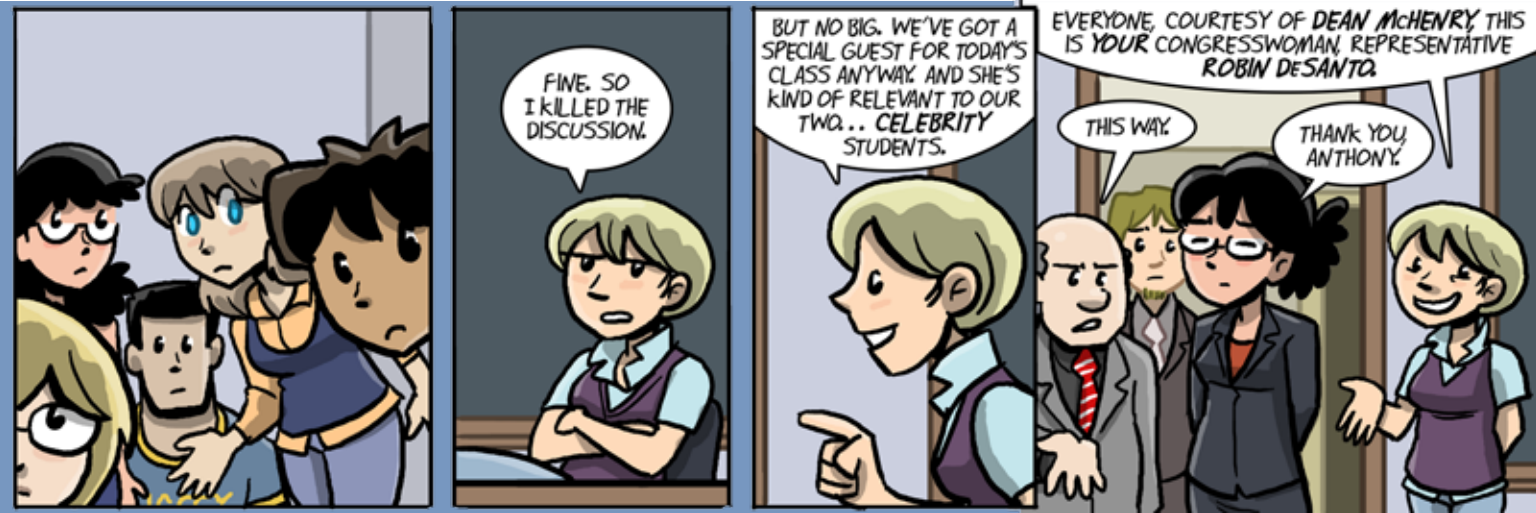
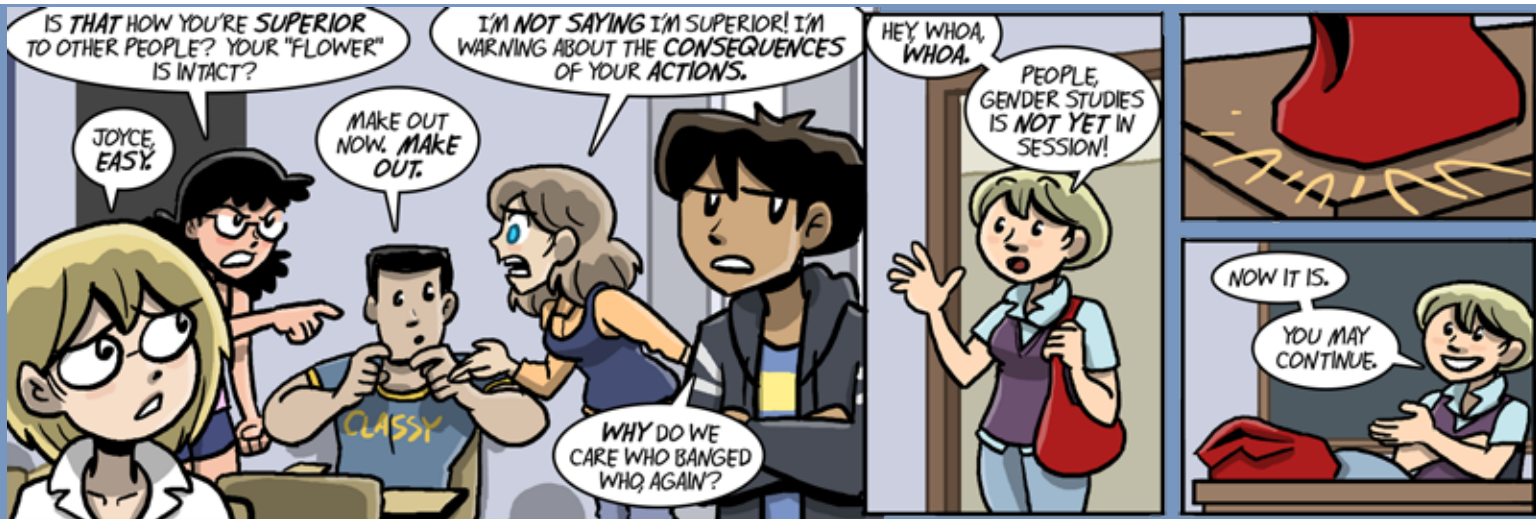
PREMARITAL HANKY-PANKY!

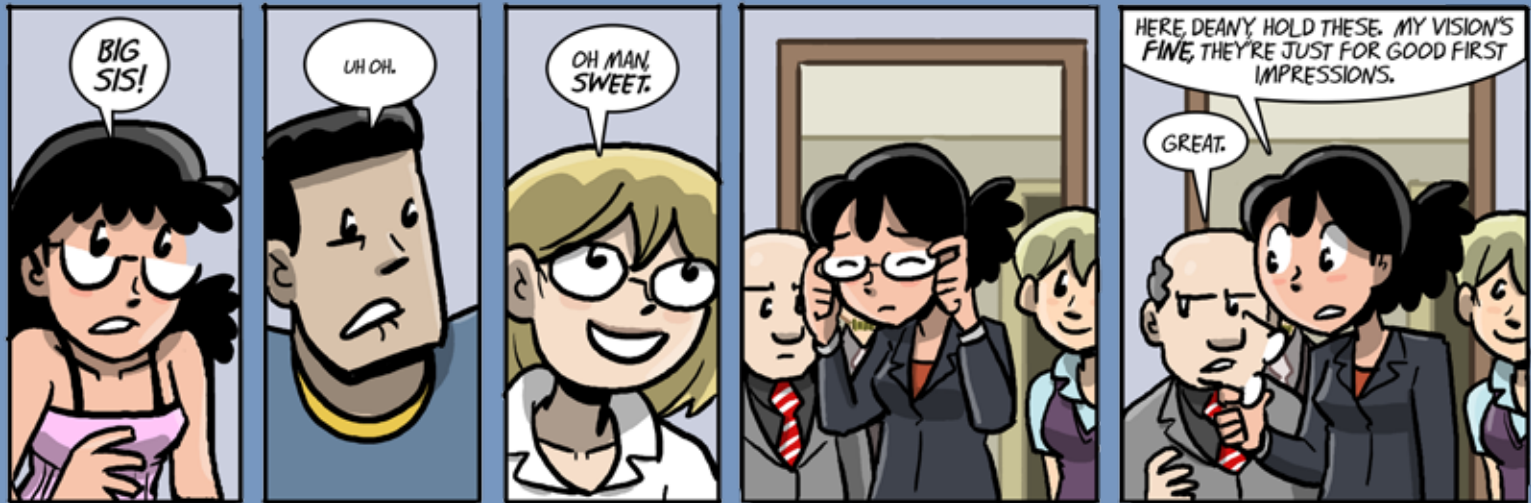


Hey, look, it's Joyce's catchphrase.

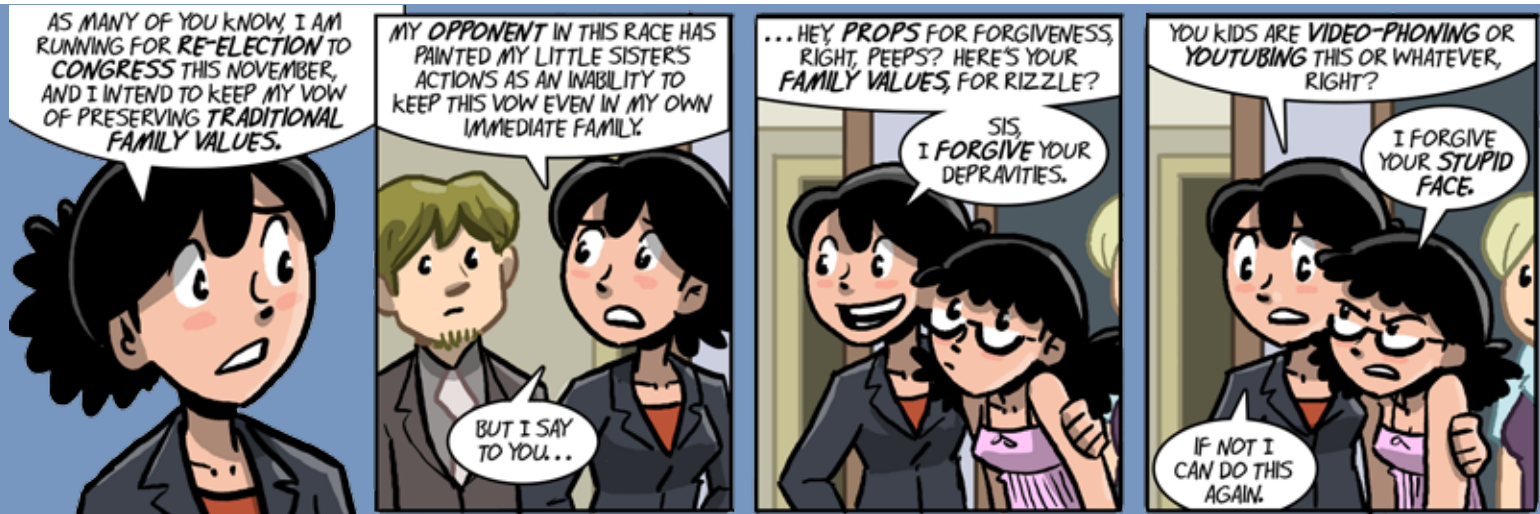


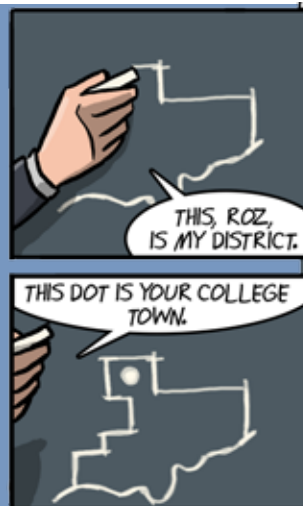
Joyce's flower pedal analogy is something I was taught as a kid. Marrying someone who isn't a virgin is like buying milk after the sell-by date. Somehow this person has lost some tangible, unrecoverable value.



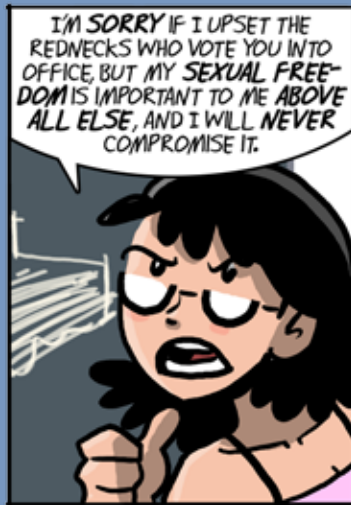


The previous strip ran on a Friday, and this one ran the following Monday. Folks spent a whole weekend debating whether Roz's sister was indeed smart and together. Glasses work!





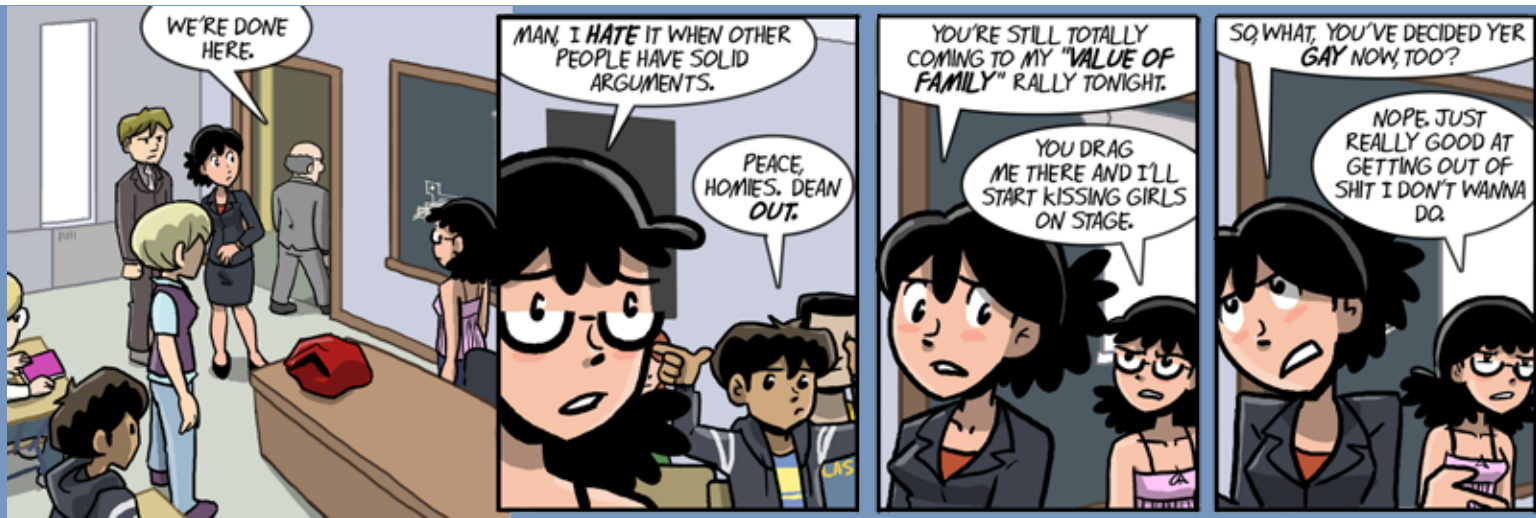
In case Walky is being too obtuse here, he's from Evansville.



Roz has spent a loooooooooong time thinking about this.



...but she still forgot to consider some angles.



ROZ DESANTO

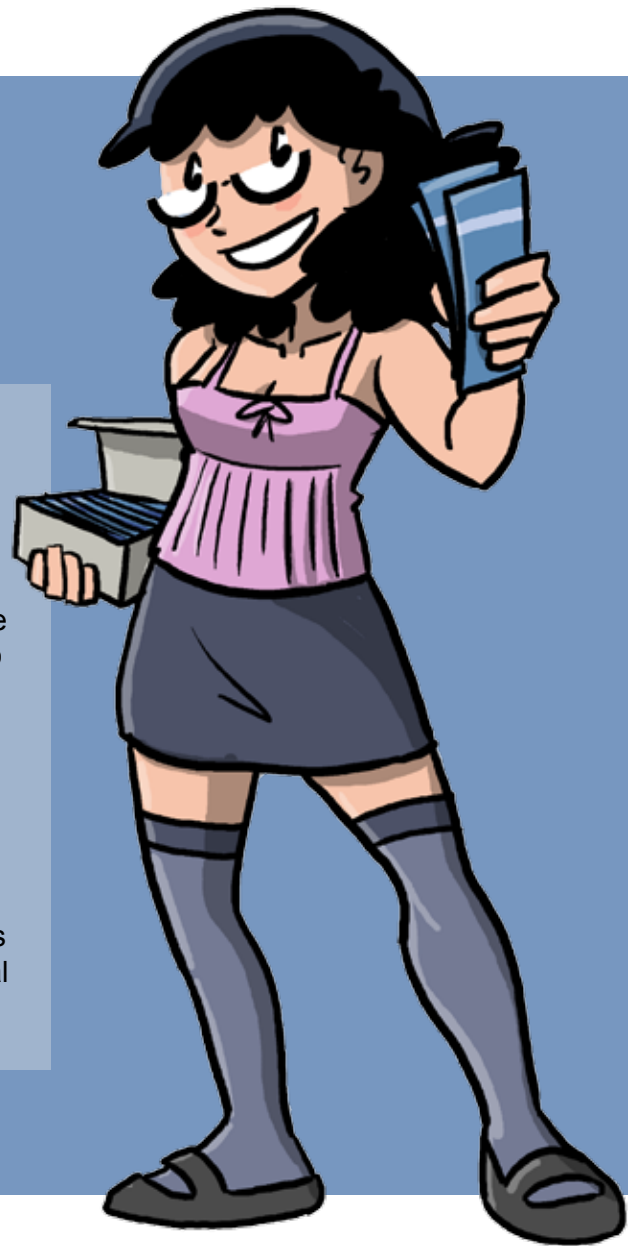
Hometown: New Albany, Indiana

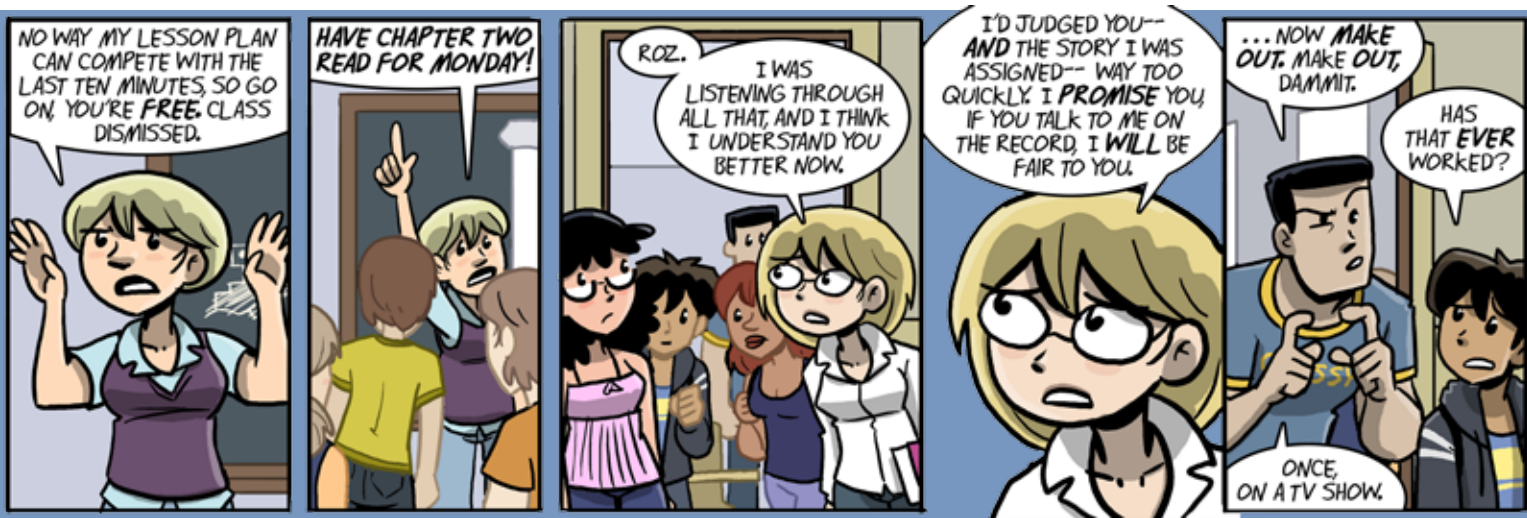
Major: Gender Studies

Likes: Sex, activism, sex activism

Roz is a cheerleader for reproductive rights, both in the usual general sense and her specific desire to be able to film her exploits for the Internet as she pleases. Unsurprisingly, she's a polarizing figure. Sure, this is a college campus, but it's still friggin' Indiana.

Most of the friction is caused within her own family. Her older sister, Robin, is a freshman Representative for the Ninth Congressional District of Indiana, and is up for reelection in the fall. Roz hates most of her older sister's political platforms, and wouldn't think twice about political sabotage.





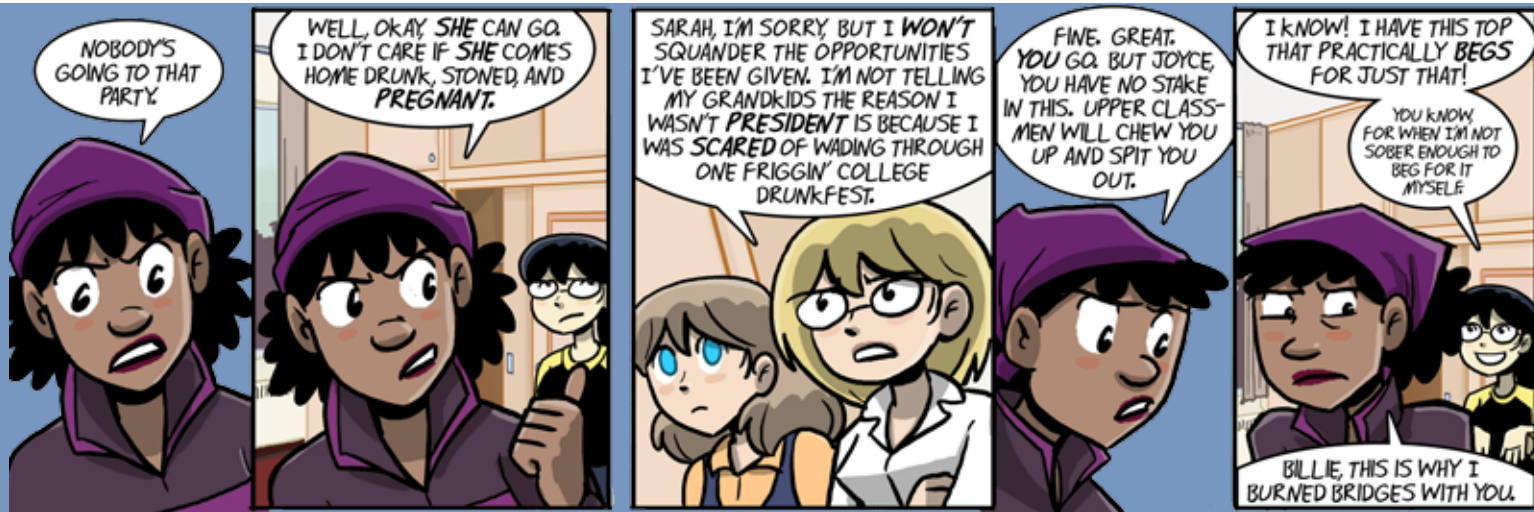
"Now make out" was our most popular watching-*Smallville* passtime.



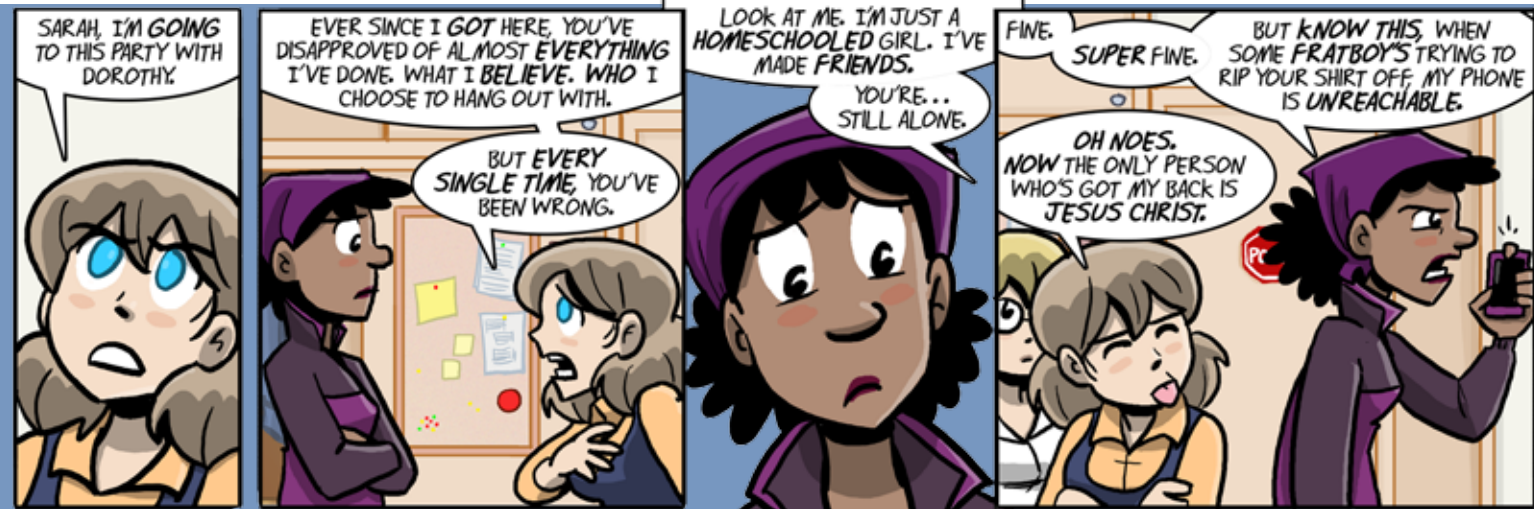
152 Apples to Apples is the funnest game. Our perennial winning cards are "barfing," "Batman," and "wheat." "Wheat" makes any adjective funny, swear to God.

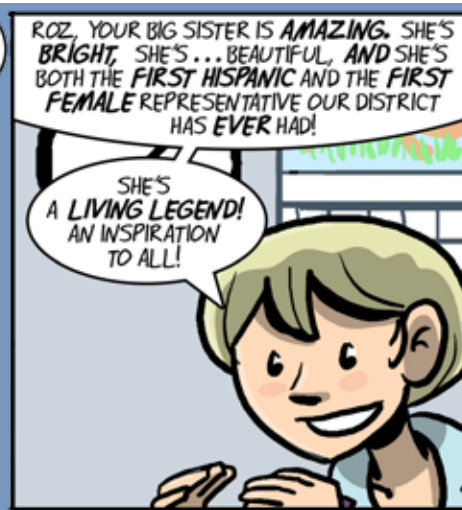
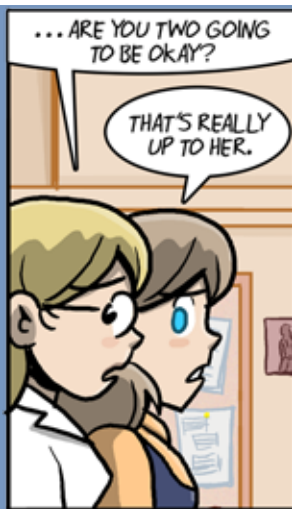


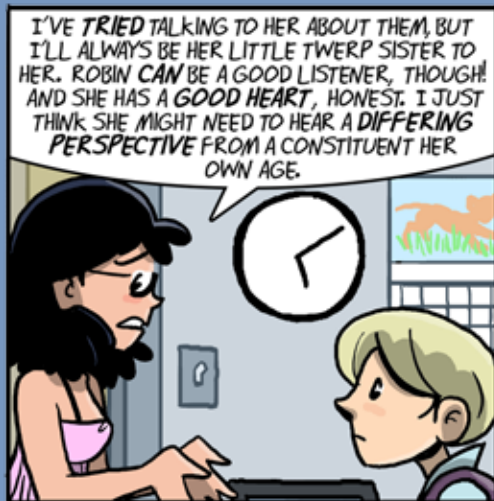
I don't know why kids love to hang out in Walmart parking lots at midnight, but I imagine Sal is likely one of them.



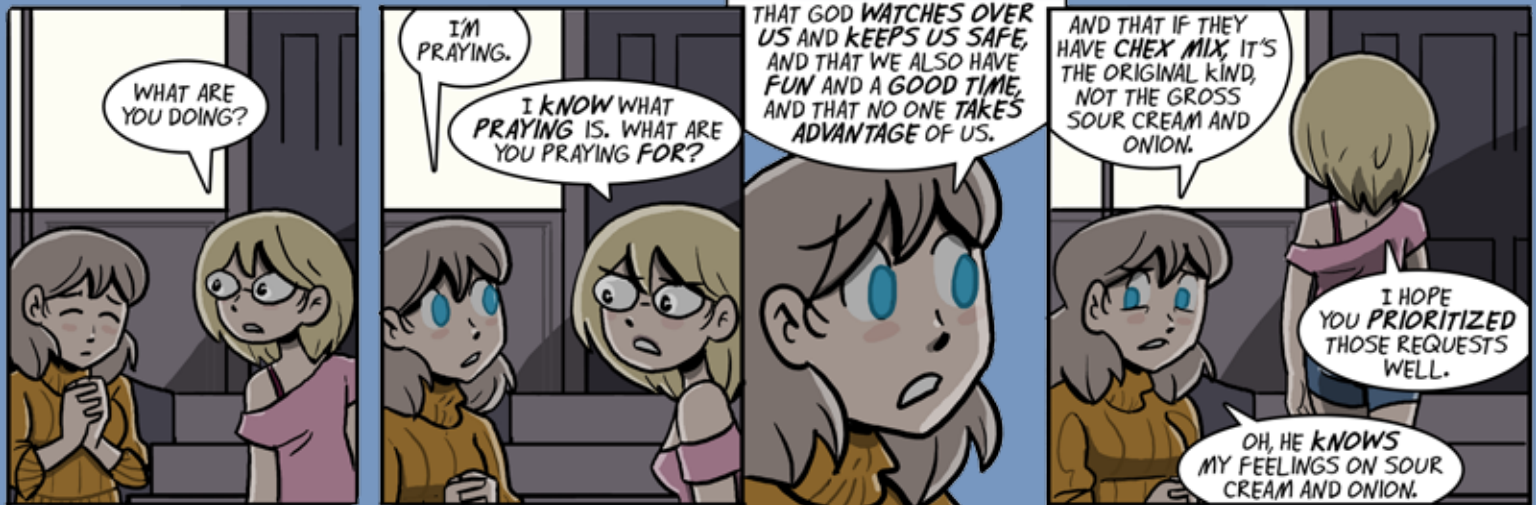
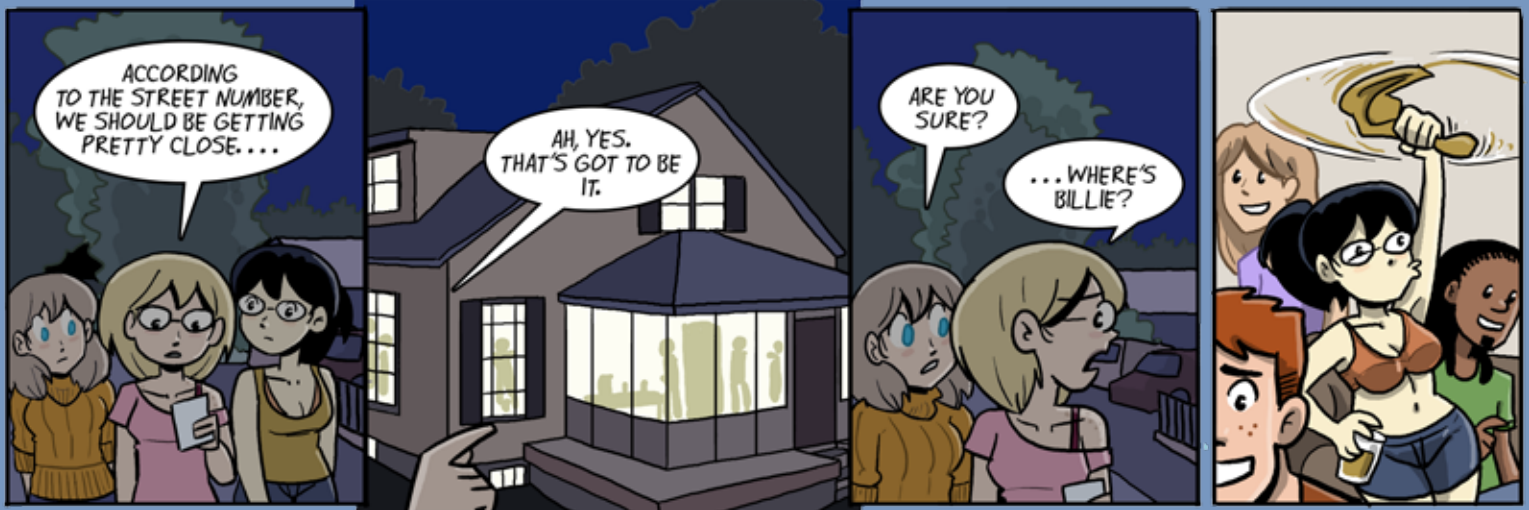
Billie is sometimes worrying.





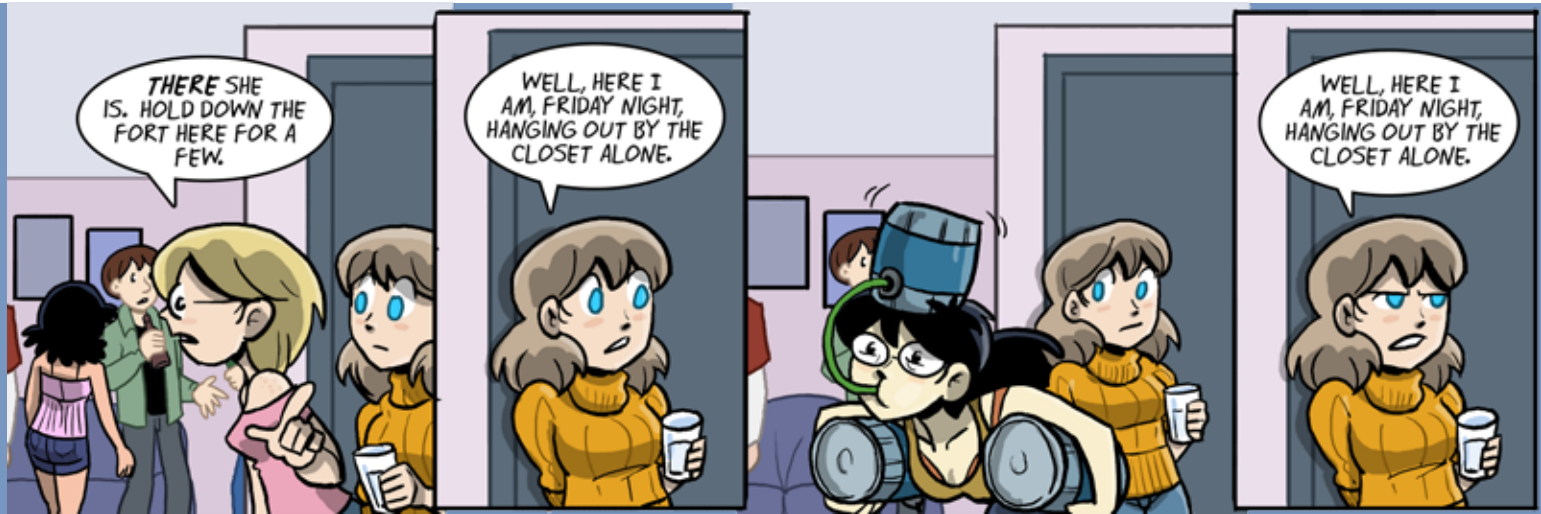


Though Billie is sometimes worrying, as noted previously, she does give good advice here.

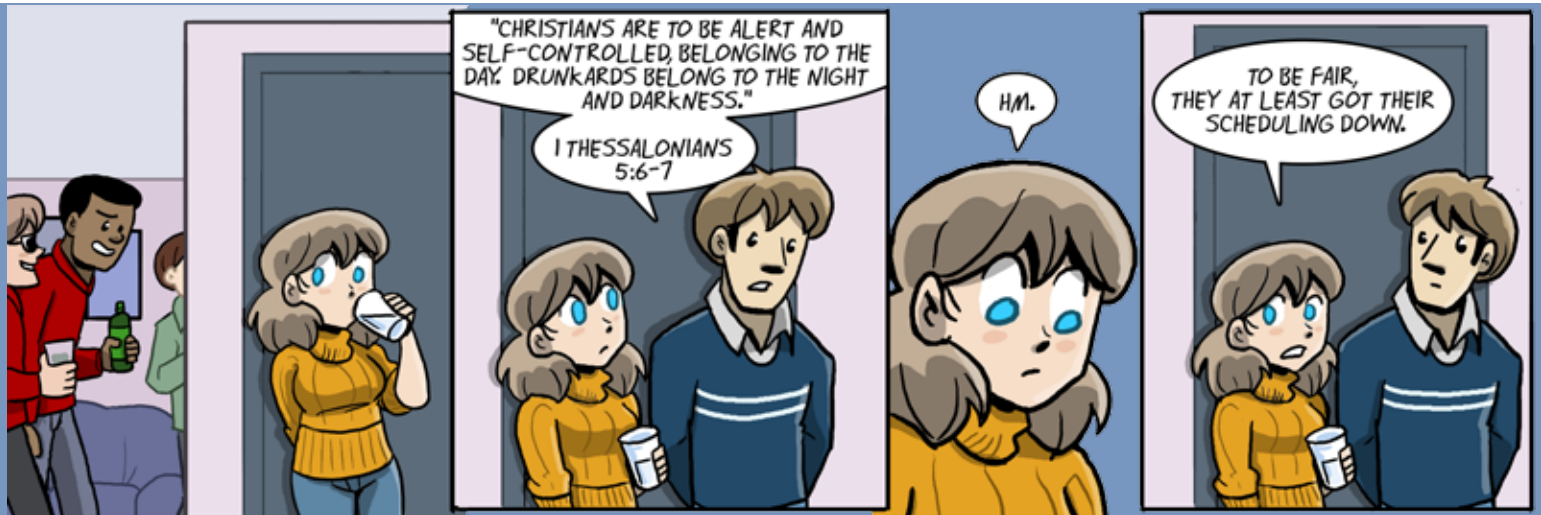


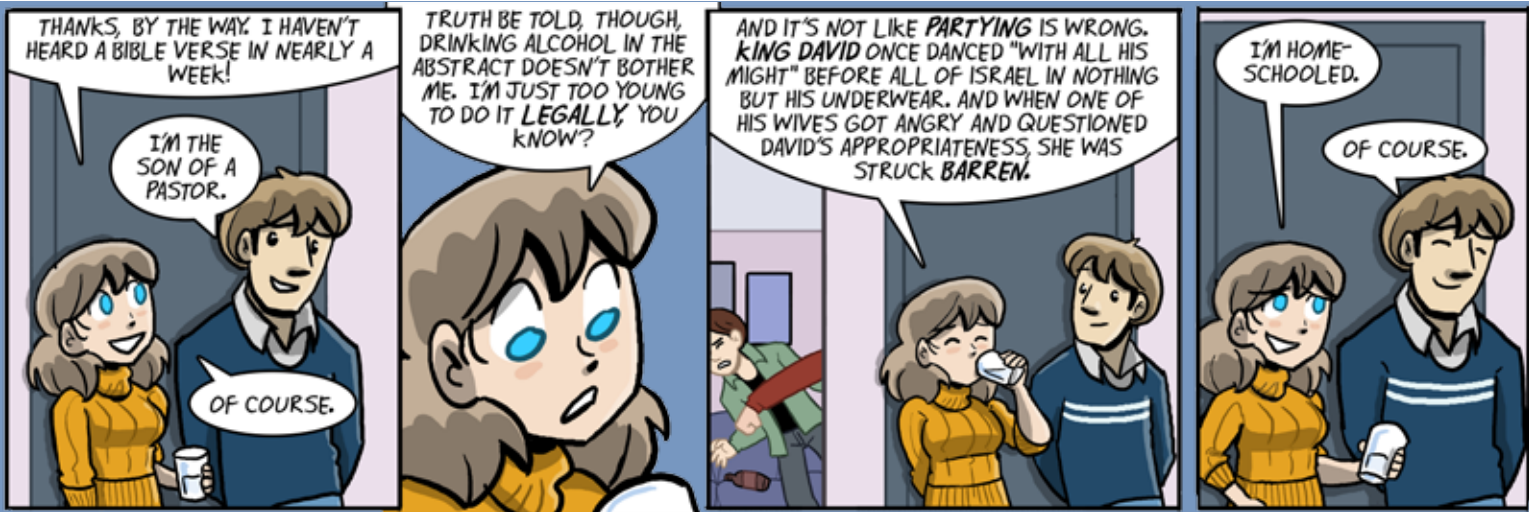
The word balloons here regrettably covered up a very nicely-drawn Dorothy tuckus.



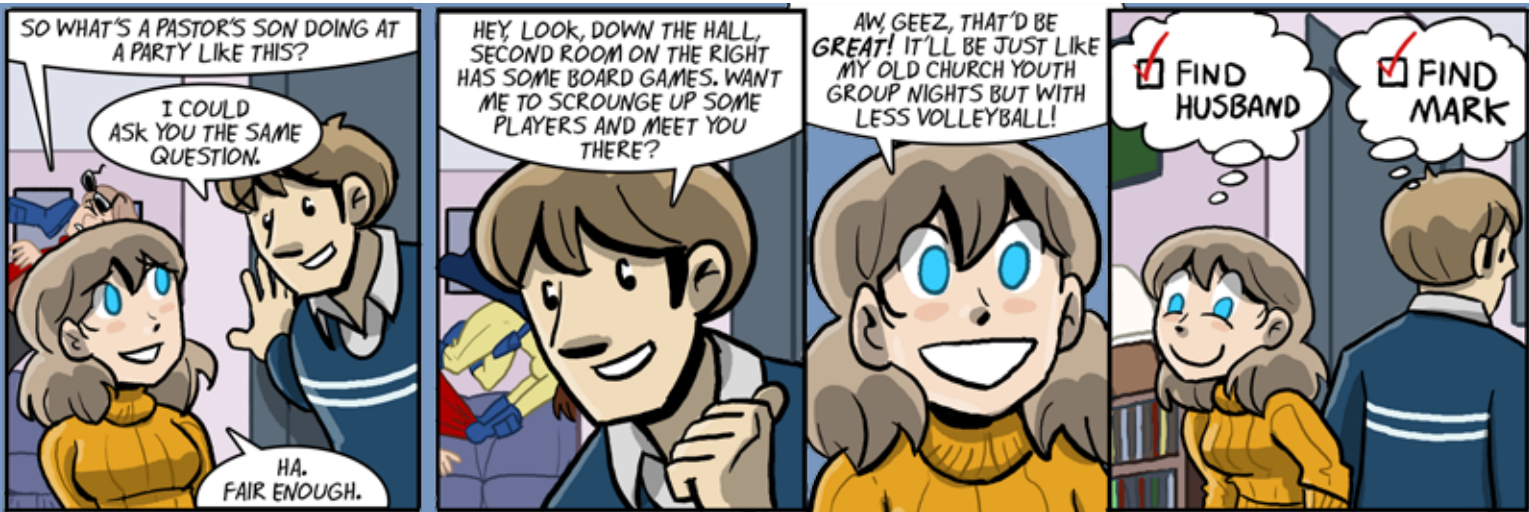


Be sure to watch the goings-on in the background in these next few strips.

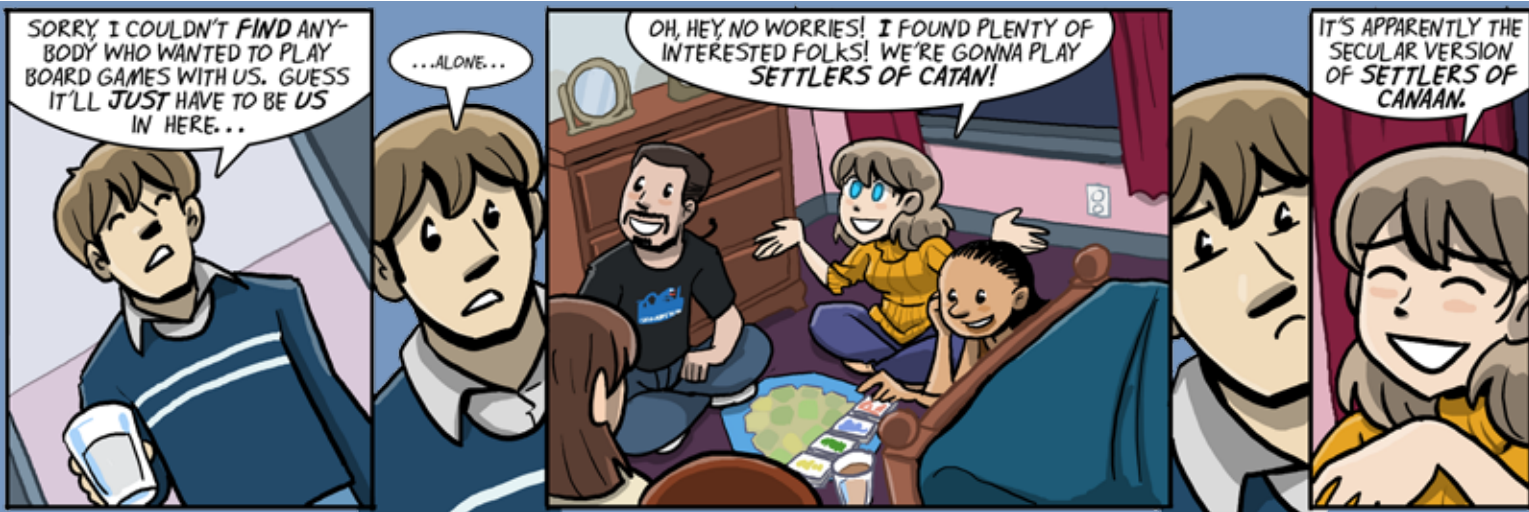




Our family left the Baptist church when I was in fourth grade for this reason. My parents liked getting down and funky.



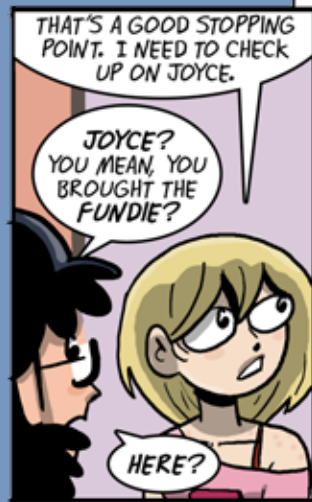
No, this guy hasn't found a someone named Mark. Look it up in the dictionary.



A real thing. There are Christian versions of eeeeeverything.

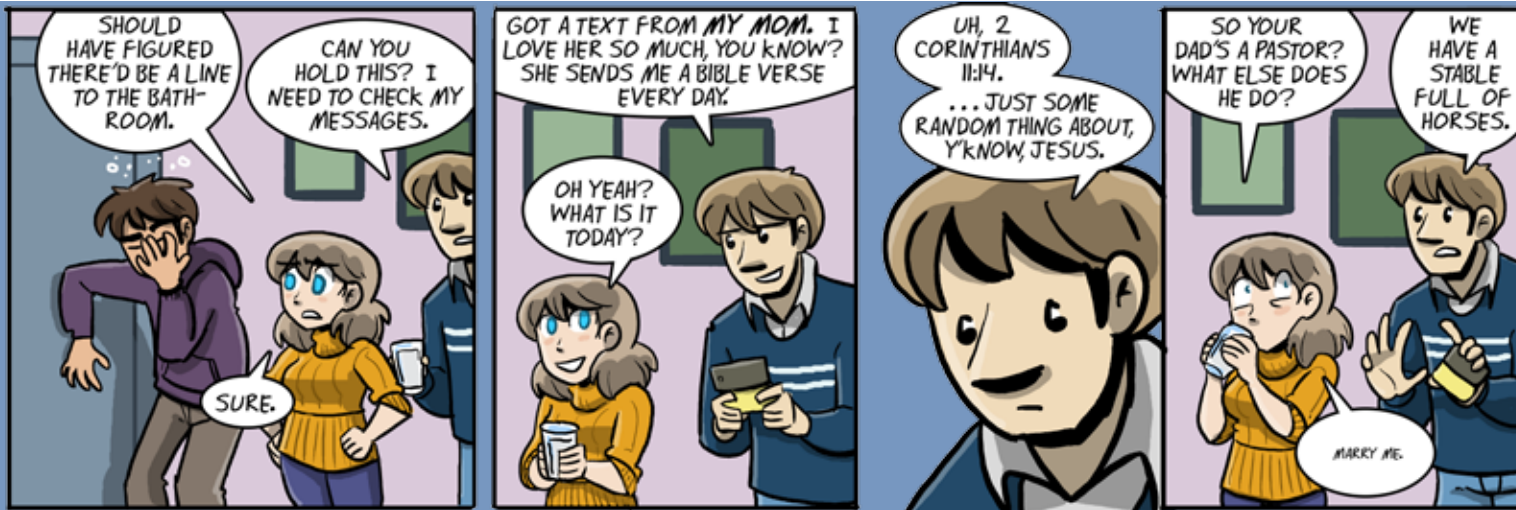


162 This book was really close to being titled "I Am Queen of the Drunks!" I couldn't find a cover concept that worked well with it, however.



Goatee dude is wearing a "Groverfield" t-shirt. Those are sold by my heterosexual lifepartner Joel Watson (hijinksensue.com).





2 Corinthians 11:14 is, of course: "And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light."



That's Magnitude from *Community* in the background of the first panel.



This storyline had a very important self-imposed rule. At no point would I allow myself to end a strip on a cliffhanger where Joyce was in immediate physical danger.



And so one strip ends with Joyce SPKOWing the guy and the other ends with him getting clubbed. I wanted to tell this story, but there's a 24-hour wait between strips, and I don't think I could personally endure the intermission otherwise.



That last panel is why Sarah is my favorite. Keeping her to the background for most of this book because of her antisocial issues paid off so wonderfully here.



Researching this storyline was the worst. I'm sure the government has me on some sort of list now for the things I've had to input into Google. I felt crawly all over.



AMAZI-GIRL

Hometown: ?

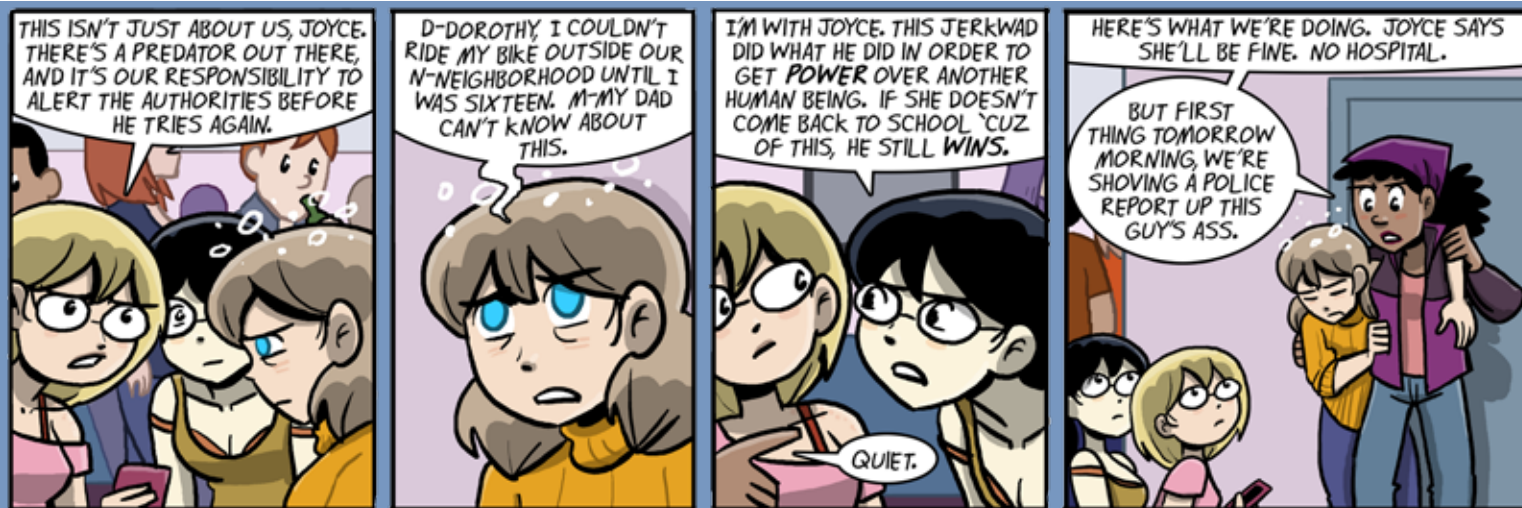
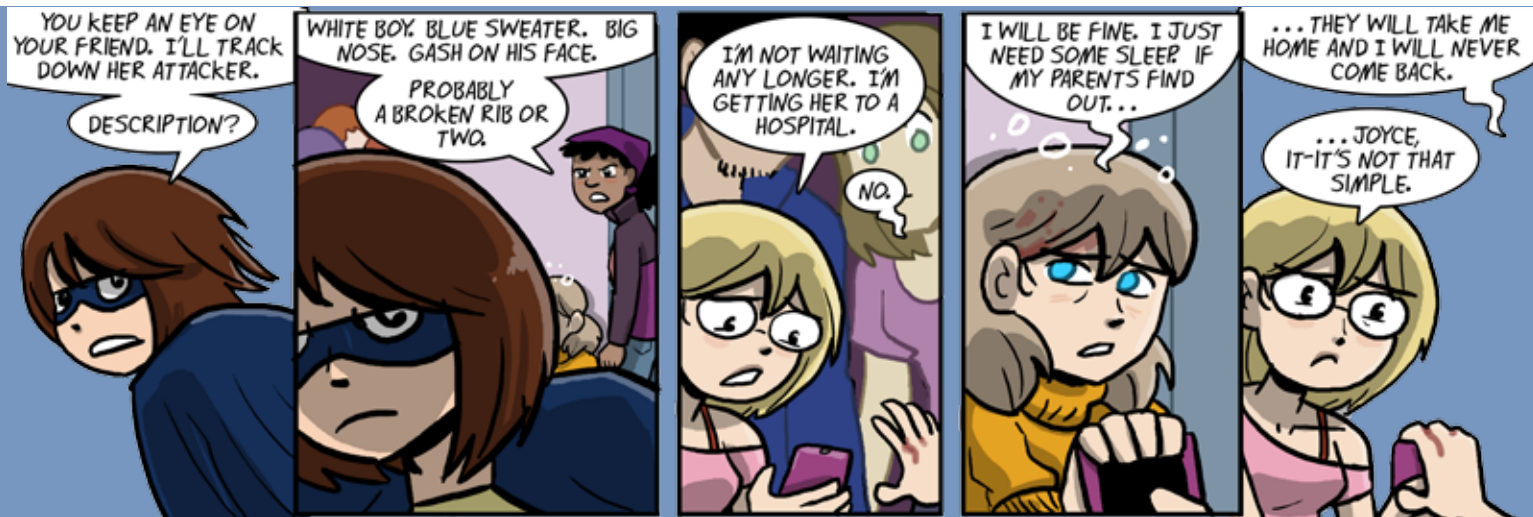
Major: ?

Likes: Justice, the night, playing as Wiggler in Mario Kart

Deep in the corridors of campus, there strikes something dark, something fierce, something terrible. When innocents are threatened, she arrives swiftly and unseen, hovering over danger like some predatory bird. And quicker than the eye, she is gone, justice dispensed.

Someone's been reading too many comic books. Or has some anger issues. Or both.





My characters had all sorts of differing views on the right way to proceed after this, and not all of them were correct. Hey, this comic's titled *Dumbing of Age*, not *Everyone's Super Smart All The Time*.



THANKS FOR THE RIDE BACK TO CAMPUS.

IT'S THE LEAST I COULD DO. I'M RON, BY THE WAY.



I THINK I'VE SEEN THAT LITTLE SHIT BEFORE. IF I SEE HIM SHOW UP TO A PARTY OF MINE AGAIN, I PROMISE I'LL CALL THE POLICE.



SO WHAT WERE YOU DOING AT THE PARTY, SARAH? I THOUGHT YOU HATED ALL OF US.

NO, JUST YOU.

YEAH, I GET THAT.



LET'S JUST SAY THAT I REALLY ENJOY A GOOD "I TOLD YOU SO," BUT I REALIZED IT'S ONLY TACTFUL TO EMPLOY WITHIN A CERTAIN THRESHOLD OF TRAGEDY.



GEESH, SHE'S HEAVIER THAN SHE LOOKS.



COULD HAVE SWORN SHE WAS AT LEAST THIRTY PERCENT SWEATER.

GNNGH. LOFTS AREN'T VERY DRUNK FRIENDLY.



MAYBE I SHOULD STAY UP THERE NEXT TO HER TONIGHT? WHAT IF SHE STOPS BREATHING? THIS WAS ALL MY FAULT FOR LEAVING HER ALONE IN THE FIRST PLACE!



SHUT UP, DOROTHY. THIS ISN'T REMOTELY YOUR FAULT.



YOU SPENT THE ENTIRE CAR TRIP TELLING US IT IS OUR FAULT!

OKAY, YOU GOT ME. I JUST LIKE TELLING PEOPLE THEY'RE WRONG.



BONUS CONTENT



OKAY CLASS, YOU WERE ASSIGNED THE **SECOND CHAPTER** OF

The Year of Living Biblically

BY A.J. JACOBS.

THE AUTHOR IS TRYING TO FOLLOW THE LAWS WRITTEN IN THE BIBLE AS LITERALLY AS POSSIBLE FOR A YEAR.

JOYCE, CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT HAPPENS?

THE UM, THE AUTHOR TALKS ABOUT HOW HE'S FORBIDDEN FROM, UH, TOUCHING HIS WIFE DURING HER, UH... YOU KNOW.

SEE, AND HE CAN'T TOUCH ANYTHING THAT SHE TOUCHED EITHER DURING...

HER, UM,...

HER, UH...

YOU REALLY CAN'T SAY IT?

HER, UH, LADY... TIME?

HER MENSTRUAL CYCLE.

THIS OFFENDS HIS WIFE AND SO SHE SITS ON EVERY CHAIR IN THE HOUSE, KEEPING HIM FROM BEING ABLE TO SIT DOWN ENTIRELY.

HE, YEAH HAD TO BUY HIS OWN CHAIR.

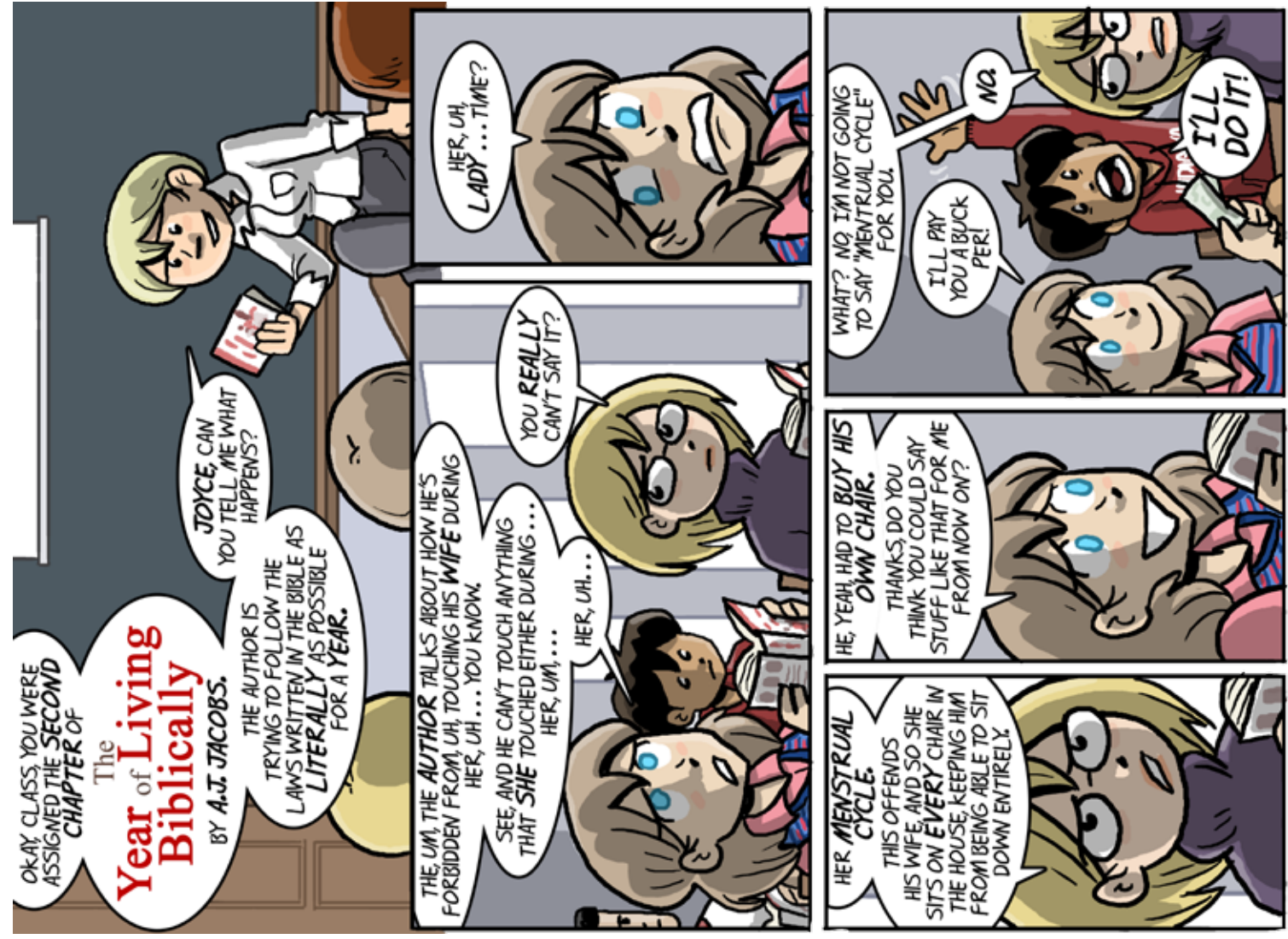
THANKS, DO YOU THINK YOU COULD SAY STUFF LIKE THAT FOR ME FROM NOW ON?

WHAT? NO I'M NOT GOING TO SAY "MENSTRUAL CYCLE" FOR YOU.

I'LL PAY YOU A BUCK PER!

NO.

I'LL DO IT!



This is a guest strip I did for Bill Barnes and Gene Ambaum's *Unshelved* (unshelved.com), a library-themed webcomic which does a book review every week. Sorry, but it only fits in the book sideways!



Dumbing of Age's chronology is still stuck in the late weeks of August, which means I probably won't be doing many appropriately-timed seasonal strips. But here's a Christmas image I drew for my Tumblr.

I had a lot of folks try to "correct" me by saying that Song of Solomon is the dirty part of the Bible. C'mon, folks, Song of Solomon is about a **dude being sexually interested in his wife**. Joyce ain't gonna find that dirty. That is proper and right, even though it might make her giggle.

Ezekiel 23's tale of the two adulterous sisters, however...



Back in *Roomies!* everyone wore the same outfit all the time because my art was primitive and it was easier to tell everyone apart that way. Also because that just happens in cartoons. It's a done thing!

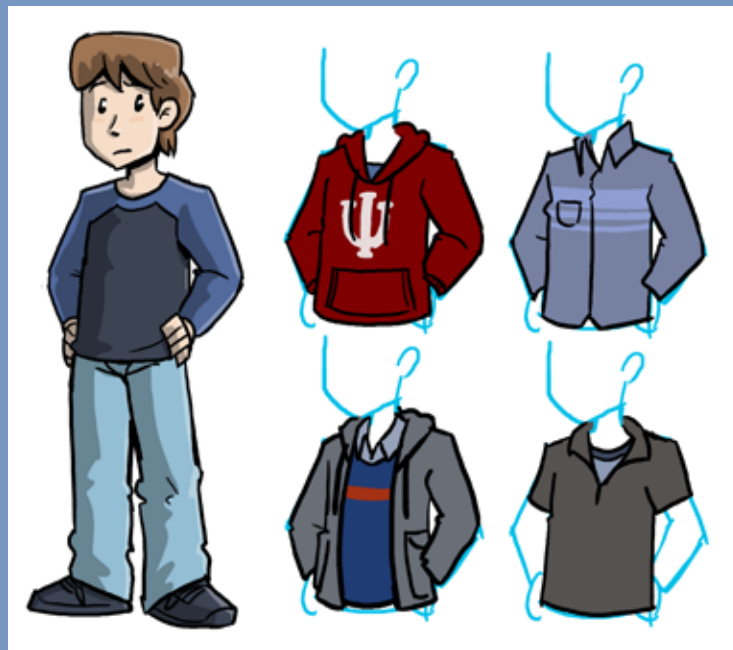
But for *Dumbing of Age*, when I was starting to put this universe together, I wanted everyone to have several changes of clothes. And I wanted the changes of clothes to be thought out instead of a by-the-seat-of-my-pants sort of thing. That way I can blank colored t-shirts!

So here's some Joyce torsos that I brainstormed. I want every character to have their own style, and Joyce's is, uh, "sweater vests." That's even the name of the file. Not only does she wear a variety of sweater vests, but they're also all using a certain range of colors that I've assigned to her. Orange! Pink! Brown!



Sarah's another character that I created back in the Nineties, specifically as a foil for Joyce. I wanted to flesh her out more this time around. (Of course, by making her cynical and avoidant, she kind of writes herself out of most situations. Whenever I put her into a strip, she tries to escape.)

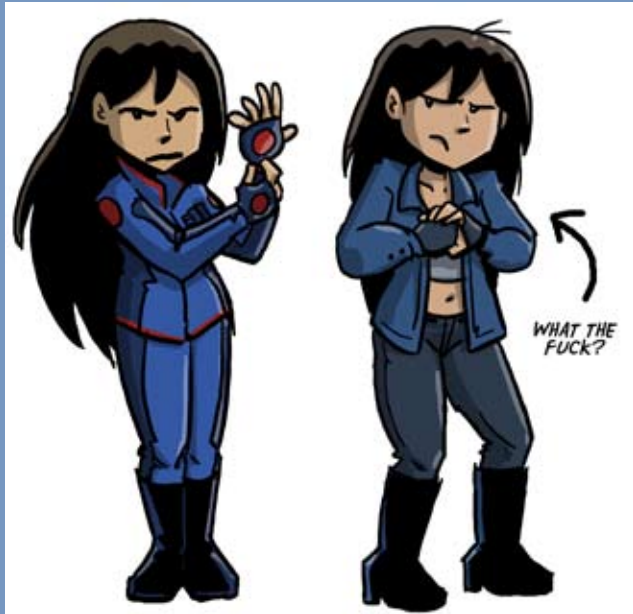
Back then, Sarah's only outfit was a purple tank top. I kept it for the first outfit here, but added more layers to it, with the shirt underneath and the everpresent kerchief. Her colors remained thematically purple, though I added green to her palette.



Out of all my *Dumbing of Age* cast, Danny is probably my earliest creation. He started out as an author insert when I was in elementary school.

Since then, Danny's found the role of the boring everyman, and I've noticed he's become increasingly sidelined by more interesting characters. He's principled and moralistic, which is both a strength and a weakness.

Figuring out his wardrobe was easy. He's boring. If Breckin Meyer wore it in a movie, so can Danny.



Sal was the hardest of my older characters to adapt for *Dumbing of Age*. Previously she'd never going to college. She was more of a nomadic superhero. And so in my attempt to college-ify her as an enigmatic, brawling motorcycle chick, I drew a **homeless man**.

My wife, Maggie, was all, "Dude, what the fuck. That's awful." And she was right, of course. She helped me as we looked through Google Images of actual motorcycle-riding outfits. She told me what had to be done. And I did it. Sal is Maggie's creation. She's our little baby that we made together, and just like real babies, the wife did all of the actual work.

I knew there was some reason I married her!



The "97" on the shirt Billie wears in her first appearance refers to 1997, the date that *Roomies!* started. I really like this shirt, but I also like the hoodie. But then, I just like hoodies.

Billie's harder to dress than the others if only because Billie should by all rights be fashionable. Joyce dresses like she's Rick Santorum and Sarah couldn't really give a crap. But Billie is popular. And so I felt more wary about putting together her wardrobe.

Fellow webcartoonist T Campbell and I sat next to each other at a convention the weekend *Dumbing of Age* first began publishing, and we talked about the problems plaguing aging male artists attempting to nonlaughingly clothe teenagers. How do those Archie folks do it?



Ruth was a character I created for Roomies!, and she's best known for her tragic ending. That's not something I intend to repeat in *Dumbing of Age*. I already did that story! This Ruth is here to stay, unfortunately for Billie.

Giving Ruth a series of outfits was another difficult thing for me. I had to ditch her original look entirely, which was a green shirt and black overall shorts, since I didn't think it fit her function in the story, nor was it anything anybody would actually wear. So I had to start from scratch. Her green collared shirt with the black sweatervest is kind of a visual approximation of it, but I think what really gets into what Ruth is about is her hockey jersey. That's Ruthless all over.



It's Walky and Dorothy's favorite cartoon characters, Dexter (the Head Alien) and Monkey Master!

The challenge in their designs was their format. In my previous webcomics, the duo were actual villains, one from outer space and the other his big robo-gorilla sidekick. But *Dumbing of Age* lacks these science-fiction elements, and so Head Alien and Monkey Master are instead only fictional characters in a popular cartoon. This change meant I had to redesign them to look more Cartoon Networky. Y'know, dropping lines, streamlining shapes, increasing saturation, that sort of thing. Their outlines are also thicker and I try to draw them "flatter," if you know what I mean.



Compared to everyone else, Dorothy is a relatively new character. Until *Dumbing of Age*, we never learned much about her real personality since she spent most of her time being mind-controlled by aliens.

So this, I feel, is the first time I've really written Dorothy, and I've been surprised by how important she quickly became to the story. She didn't exist yet in my earliest brainstorming sessions for *Dumbing of Age*, and only got tossed in once I realized Danny needed a high school girlfriend to break up with him. And then she sort of took over as Joyce's unlikely best friend. I love her too much.

It was rough deciding on a wardrobe for her. It kept on turning into Joyce's sea of sweatervests. I think I've managed to find her look as time went by.



Walky started as another elementary school self-insertion character, though he's remained a little more transparently so over the years, if only because I often use his name as my online screen name.

He wears hoodies. He wears hoodies and only hoodies. The only time he doesn't wear hoodies is if he's in his pajamas. See that red Indiana University hoodie? I wore that when I was a kid. A lot. There are few pictures of me from my childhood where I'm not wearing some version of it.

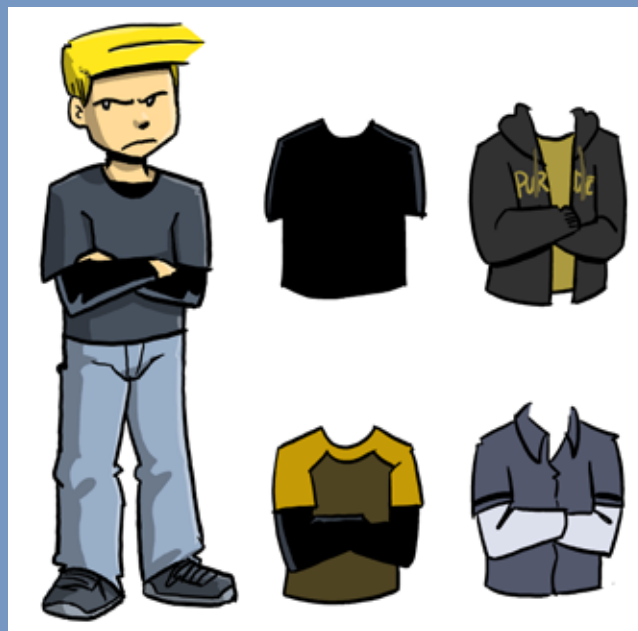
I'm not sure Walky needs so many different ones, though. He's a slob, and so he'd probably just wear the same one for a whole month.



While Danny began as a elementary school self-insert for me, Joe was a self-insert for my best friend. And that dude was a horndog, I tell you.

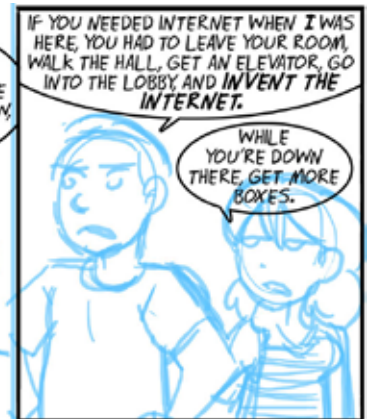
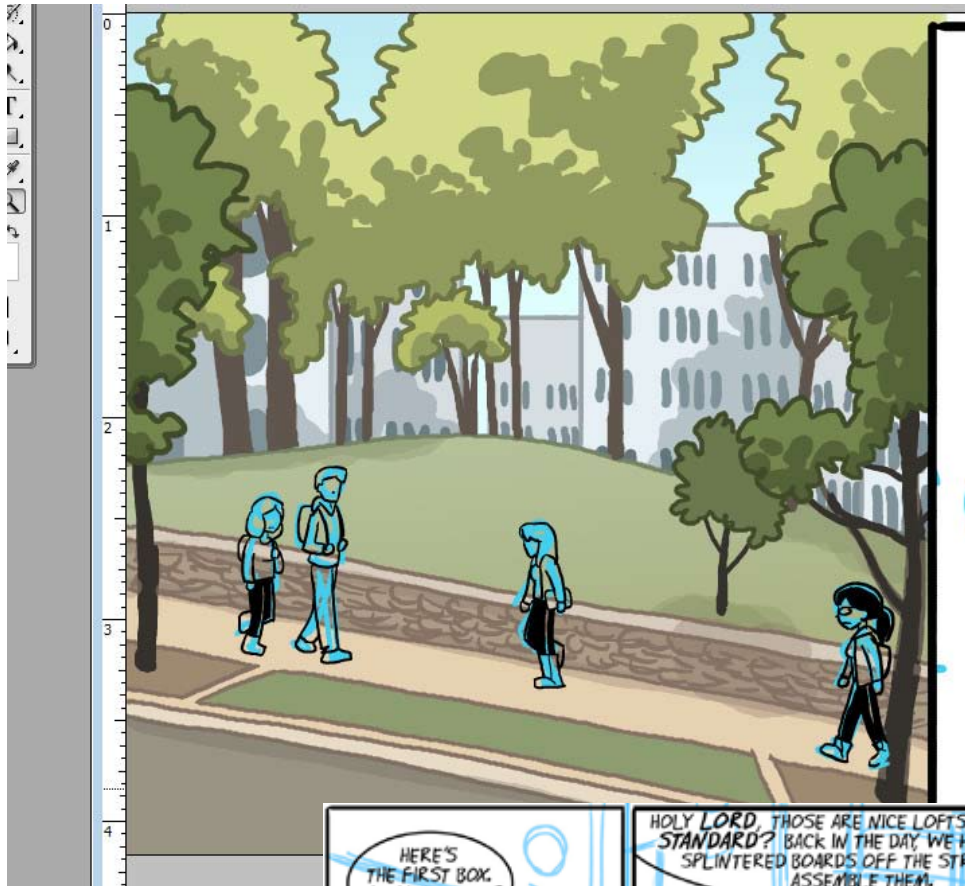
Both Joe and Danny were the main characters in *Roomies!*, the main inspiration for *Dumbing of Age*, but in this story, Joyce and the girls' wing of the dorm is the focus, so Danny and Joe kind of take a back seat. Which is fine, 'cuz I've written a lot of stories about those two already.

Joe is a bro. And so he wears a lot of Ed Hardy shirts. Those are a lot more appropriate than his attire from his previous incarnation, where he dressed in a purple luau shirt. I kept his green and purple colors from then, though.

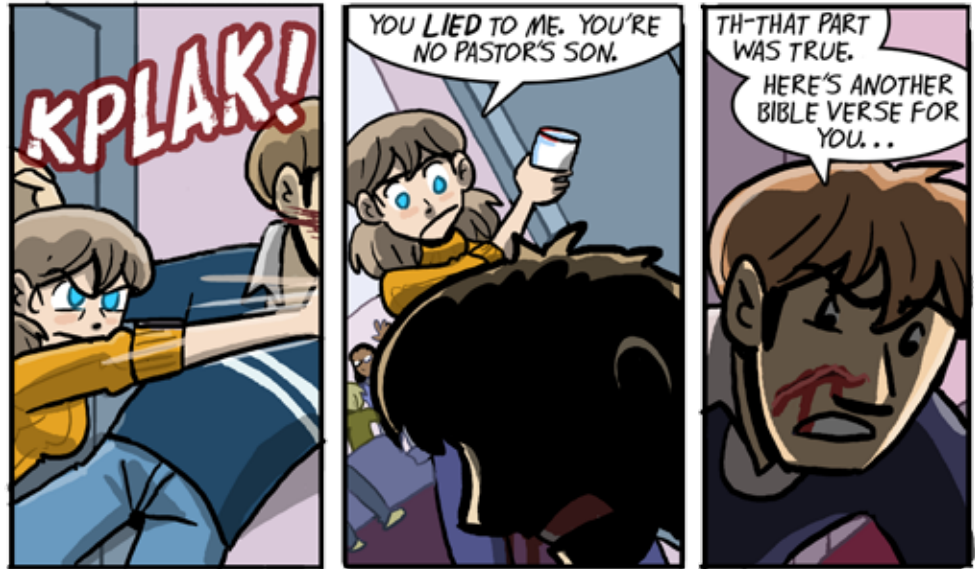


Mike may be my most popular character. He's a little overexposed, since the sheer force of his assholeish personality can easily overtake a situation, so I've kept him mostly quiet in these earlier stories to allow other characters to have their say. He's gathering intel, if you want an in-universe explanation.

Mike's another guy who was hard for me to grow his wardrobe, though I'd started chiseling away at that difficulty already in *Shortpacked!*. The gray/black shirt combo and the mustard/brown shirt are things I pulled from over there. Mike's more a force of nature, you see, than a mammal who wears clothing.



Here I have some images of strips in the penciling or inking stages, which I'd saved to publish on my Tumblr. Fun fact: I draw my strips digitally!



To the left is the image I drew for the *Dumbing of Age* display banner I take with me to conventions. In real life it stands about six feet tall!

Above are some alternate versions of panels from the strips on page 165. I originally drew the more bloody, violent versions seen on those pages, but after some consideration, wondered if I'd gone too far. I drew these less bloody versions and unsmashed the glass in Joyce's hand, and these panels were what first published on the website....momentarily. But once my readers discovered what they could have had, a cry for the originals rang out. And lo, they were restored! My readership is a bloodlustful group.

Although retooling the strips that followed to include Joyce's bloody hand was a lot of work, I believe it was worth it. Joyce's damaged hand has since been a useful visual tool. I'm hesitant to say it also represents her emotional scars, since the cut is bound to heal much quicker, but in the many months of strips that followed (as of this writing), it was a reminder to her and the reader of what had occurred.

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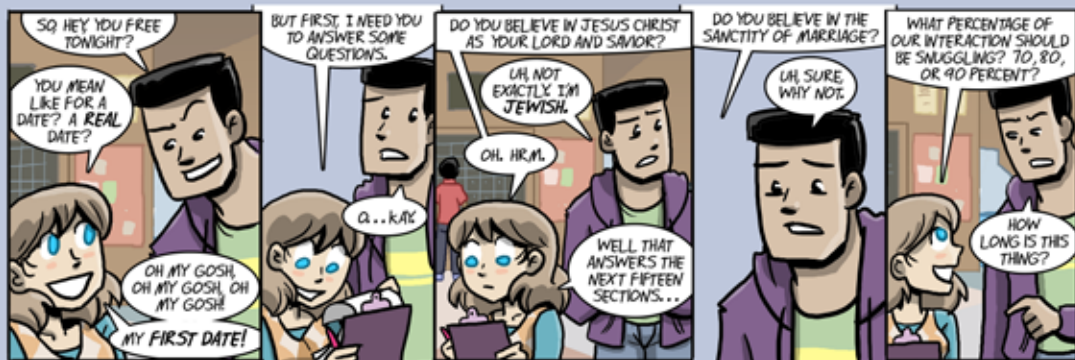
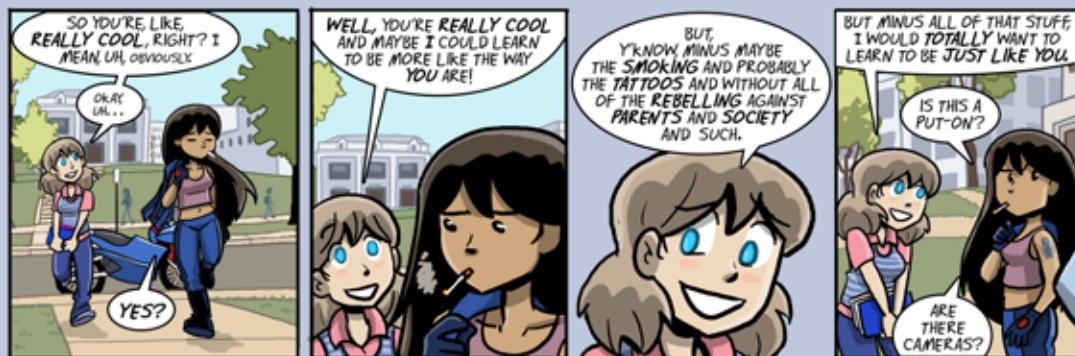
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Willis is no stranger to the world of webcomics, having started his first series, *Roomies!*, in 1997. Including *Roomies!*, he has five webcomics series under his belt, such as the sci-fi drama *It's Walky!*, its more domestic sequel *Joyce and Walky!*, *Shortpacked!*, a look at action figures and pop culture, and *Dumbing of Age*, a story about college freshman. He likes drawing comics so much that if he were to suddenly die, his strip buffer is so large that his website would keep updating months beyond his demise.

Raised in La Porte, Indiana, David Willis graduated from the Illinois Institute of Art in Schaumburg, Illinois with a Bachelor in Fine Arts. After college, he escaped the frighteningly-empty cornfields and hicks of Indiana to the frighteningly-empty cornfields and hicks of Ohio.

David Willis currently resides with his wife Maggie in Columbus, Ohio, where he surrounds himself with more Transformers toys than he can bother to count.

Joyce was homeschooled, and college is her first foray into public education. Can Dorothy, her unlikely new friend (she's an atheist! gasp!) help her navigate this diverse social environment, or is everyone here similarly out of their depth?



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