

# 10 Notable Graphic Novels Published in 2017

ARLIS/NA Graphic Novels Special Interest Group

This list was created from the results of a poll administered through the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA) Graphic Novels Special Interest Group's listserv and the ARLIS/NA listserv. Respondents of the poll were asked to select titles they believed were "innovative, memorable, or significant in the field, especially in terms of their artwork." Selections for the list were published in 2017 and are considered "graphic novels," defined by the Oxford Companion to the Book as "book-length works in the comics form, usually but not always offering a sustained narrative." The list has been compiled alphabetically by title. Reviews were written by ARLIS/NA members and edited by the Graphic Novels SIG Co-Editors. The primary objective of this list is to assist fellow (art) library workers in improving their own institutional collections of graphic novels/comics.

June 2018

<http://arlisgnsig.blogspot.com/>

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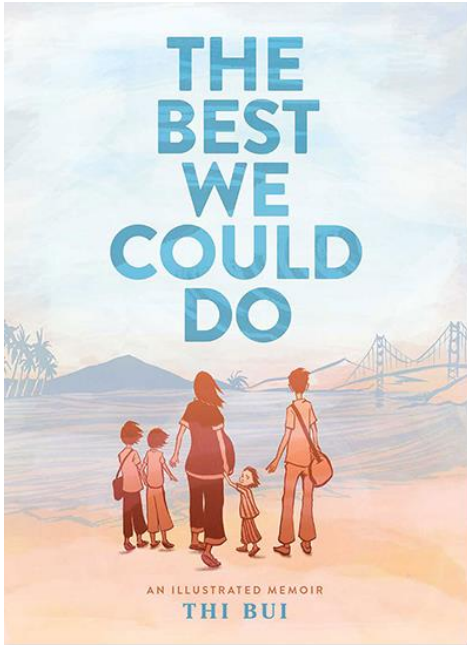
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## **The Best We Could Do**

By Thi Bui

Abrams ComicArts

[\\$24.95](#)

*The Best We Could Do* is an illustrated memoir by Thi Bui, a woman who, as a young child escaped the violence of late 1970s Vietnam with her parents and siblings. Through the mechanism of telling her family's story, Bui addresses themes and struggles of individuality, identity, loss, disappointment, and sacrifice against a backdrop of war, displacement, and uncertainty. Bui longs to understand her parents as the people they were before they met, before they were parents, when they became parents, and as immigrants whose foreign educations meant nothing in the United States. Bui considers her role as child and as mother and works through letting go of resentment and expectation as she moves toward liberation.

The author's two-color East Asian inspired ink wash illustrations are stunning, borrowing a historic tradition to add an additional layer of visual interest to her story. Layouts vary with each page and complement the text. It is hard to believe that this publication is Bui's first graphic novel.

*The Best We Could Do* has garnered much praise and has already become required reading at the college level; it was this past academic year's first year experience read at UCLA. Immigration and refugee struggles are timely topics and this book helps to humanize displaced peoples encouraging the reader to empathize. No public, K-12, or academic library should be without a copy.

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## Black Panther: World of Wakanda

Written by Roxane Gay, Yona Harvey,  
Ta-Nehisi Coates, and Rembert Browne  
Inked by Roberto Poggi, Afua N.  
Richardson, and Alitha E. Martinez  
Color by Tamra Bonvillain and Rachelle  
Rosenberg  
Letters by Vc Joe Sabino  
Penciled by Joe Bennett, Alitha E.  
Martinez, and Afua N. Richardson  
Marvel  
[\\$17.99](#)

This trade paperback (2018 GLAAD Outstanding Comic Book Award), a spin-off prequel to Ta-Nehisi Coates and Brian Stelfreeze's, *Black Panther, Volume 1* (ARLIS/NA Notable Graphic Novel Published in 2016), includes three stories in this definitive World of Wakanda series: "Dawn of the Midnight Angels" (#1-5); "Death of the White Tiger" (#6); and "The People for the People."

The main story explores the personal growth of an intimate relationship between two women, Ayo and Aneka, who happen to be warriors from the elite group of all-female personal bodyguards of the Black Panther. The final issue was written by award-winning poet, Yona Harvey (*Hemming the Water*), and centers around the villain from *Black Panther, Volume 1*.

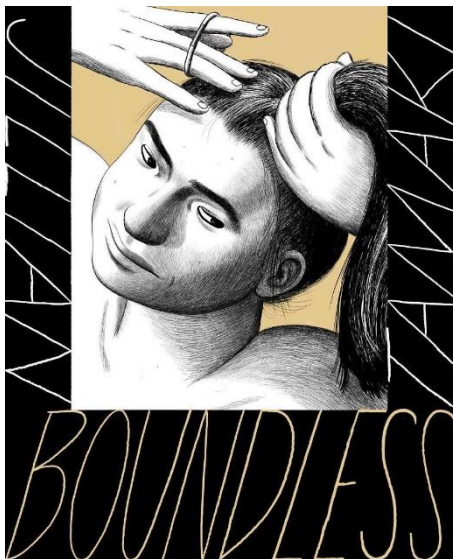
In the first six issues, penciler Alitha E. Martinez provides nuanced, detailed facial expressions and features for all characters, which expertly illustrates romance and tension. Colorist Rachelle Rosenberg uses a palette of deep reds, purples, and earth tones. In contrast, one of the most memorable and beautiful components regarding the art is the yellow/orange color theme for Ayo and Aneka: a glow, illustrated by various objects and backgrounds, signals their passion.

World of Wakanda is truly an important and historical book: the story focuses on black queer women warriors and it boasts a diverse creative team, including Roxane Gay and Yona Harvey as the first Black women to write for Marvel. To celebrate this Richardson designed into each of the five backgrounds Adinkra Symbols of the Akan Peoples of West Africa, inspired by [King Adinkra's calabash-stamped dyed cloth](#).

→

It is a great addition to libraries looking to diversify their collections or libraries with patrons interested in the Marvel Universe. It would also appeal to those interested in gender studies, queer theory, popular culture, Black and African American studies and more.

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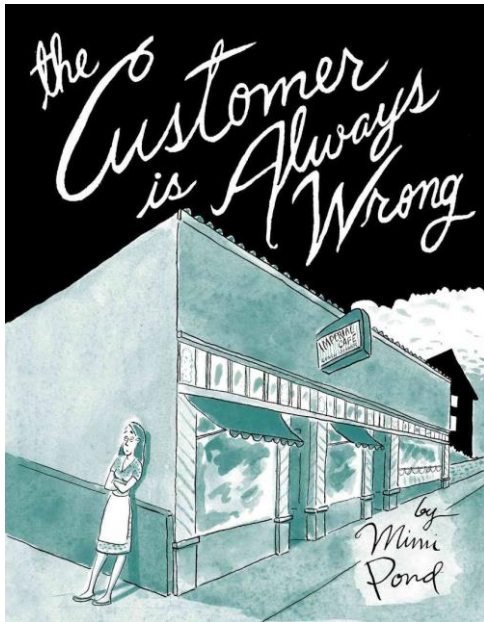
## **Boundless**

By Jillian Tamaki  
Drawn & Quarterly  
[\\$24.95](#)

Jillian Tamaki's graphic short stories cover a wide range of subjects. From the imaginary cultural phenomena of "SexCoven," to the beginnings and ending of a pornographic sitcom, Tamaki can find the most human elements in the strangest of scenarios. *Boundless* is the visual equivalent of chamber music; these existential vignettes about shrinking away to nothingness or experiencing animal consciousness balance the fantastic with the all-too-realistic experiences and emotions common to us all. Tamaki's illustration style falls somewhere between the lyricisms of Cocteau's drawings and the starkness of Raymond Pettibon. Like the narrative, the drawings are minimal but highly effective, usually done in black and only one other hue. Tamaki also varies the illustration style from story to story. These subtle changes add to the wonderful strangeness that makes her narratives so effective. Tamaki's lines and framing are very cinematic and complement the narrative well.

*Boundless* would be recommended to anyone having difficulty making sense out of the world in the 21st century. These exquisitely crafted stories focus on small moments and the hard edges of life we all experience, but through a strange and marvelous lens. Profound in the most subtle ways, *Boundless* would also serve as good introduction to contemporary women writers. From a visual perspective, any institution with a collection of modern graphic novels would be wise to add this to their collection.

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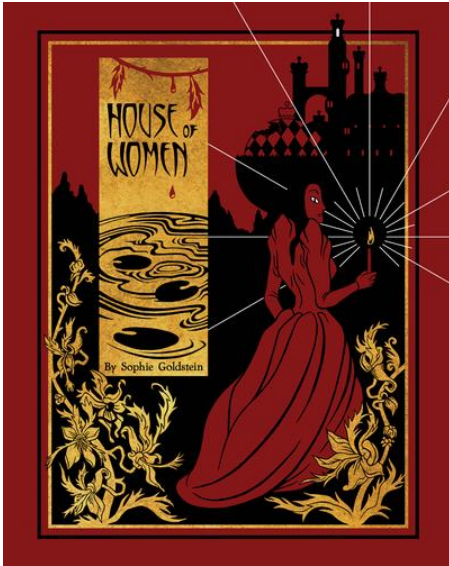


## **The Customer is Always Wrong**

By Mimi Pond  
Drawn & Quarterly  
[\\$29.95](#)

*The Customer is Always Wrong*, by Mimi Pond, is a semi-autobiographical tale that is a follow-up to 2014's *Over Easy*. The story, set in the late 1970s, finds Madge still working at the Imperial Café in Oakland to pay the bills while she works on launching her career as an artist. She has some success at selling pieces for publication which reinvigorates her dream to relocate to New York City. As we see Madge interact with coworkers and customers, we get to know intimate details about these characters with no sugar-coating. These are real people living through some tough situations. There are moments that are really funny and others that are tragic. We've all had that friend that makes poor decisions and suffers the consequences, but we still love them and try to support them as best we can. This book illuminates those friendships. It shows real people living their lives, which can be messy and painful, but also incredibly touching. The artwork is primarily line drawings highlighted with greyscale washes and restricted to a limited palette which conveys tension and emotion without being overly formal. This graphic memoir deals with several adult topics and situations, so it is suited for more mature teenagers and adults. Recommended for public and academic libraries.

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## House of Women

By Sophie Goldstein

Fantagraphics

[\\$25.49](#)

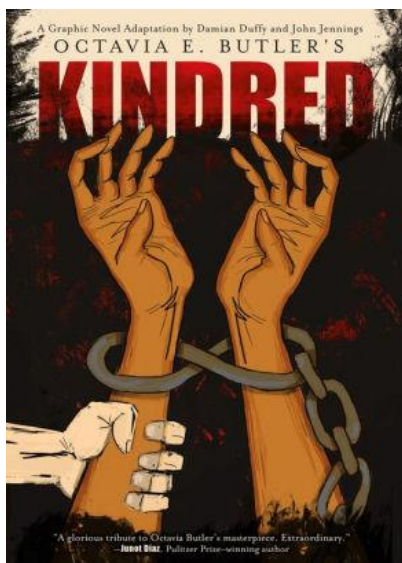
Four nuns travel to an undeveloped planet to bring the Empire's learning to the natives. As in so many other stories of encounters with the Other, the women slowly break down under the pressure of forbidden sexuality, racism, hatred and violence. The crookedness that the women bring from the Empire poses one threat in the story, but the author presents another major threat: a full-grown native male.

The black and white art visually quotes many of the cultures that disturbed Western European sensibilities during the nineteenth century. The women transform into demons and geisha from Japanese woodblock prints, and Tibetan guardian figures beckon the nuns with long curved nails and erections. Even the sinuous, vegetal forms of the art nouveau and arts and crafts movements seem sinfully sexual. Goldstein creates the sense of a treacherous space with blacks that swallow whole figures and the edges of spaces. Doorways and shadowed walls merge with cowls, vines and black waters. The lines and type are precise and deliberate. Even the binding is carefully chosen to evoke the quality bindings of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century with its embossed, gilded cover and marbled endpapers.

This would be an excellent addition to an academic art library, especially one with a strong design or illustration program.

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## **Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation**

By Octavia Butler  
Adapted by Damian Duffy  
Illustrated by John Jennings  
Introduction by Nnedi Okorafor  
Abrams Comic Arts  
[\\$24.95](#)

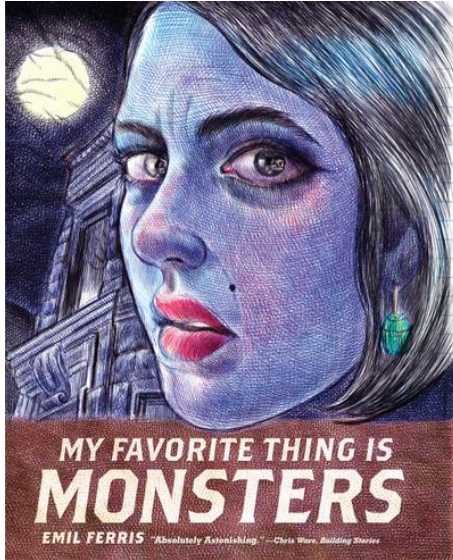
Octavia Butler's (1947-2006) landmark novel, *Kindred*, was originally published in 1979. Adapted to the medium of comics by Damian Duffy and John Jennings, this groundbreaking time-travel story is set in both 1976 California and on an early nineteenth century Maryland Plantation. Dana, an African American woman married to a white man in modern times, finds herself repeatedly travelling back in time to the plantation where the slave owner's son is her own ancestor, Rufus.

This graphic novel loses little in its translation of story and brings new and important attention to the original novel. Jennings' artwork is visually stunning and contributes to a narrative no less shocking than that provided in the original novel. Jennings employs sepia tones to depict the contemporary era, and brighter colors to bring historical Maryland to life. Paradoxes found in Butler's *Kindred* are still poignant and kept intact in both narrative and visual ways.

Ultimately, this graphic novel approaches the very best of the form in terms of important topic and meticulously detailed representation. Comparisons, in terms of subject matter and execution, to some of the most revered graphic novels—such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980-91)—are not out of line.

Highly recommended for all graphic novel collections, for young adults and adults, alike.

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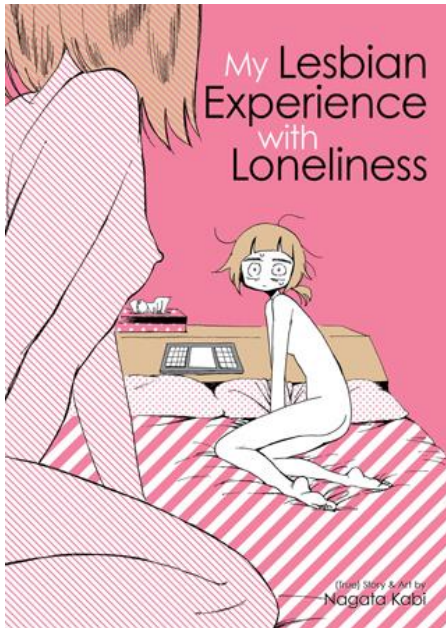


## My Favorite Thing is Monsters

By Emil Ferris  
Fantagraphics  
[\\$33.99](#)

Anyone looking for the sublime in art should spend a day (or a sleepless night) binge-reading Emil Ferris's hefty debut *My Favorite Thing is Monsters*. Drawn from the perspective of Karen Reyes, a delightfully ghoulish ten-year-old girl obsessed with monster movies and detective stories, the images leap off of the notebook paper they were painstakingly drawn on. Karen lives in an apartment with her mother and older brother Deez, and the story sets into motion when Anka, her troubled upstairs neighbor is found dead. Like many teen detectives before her, she decides to try to solve the mystery herself and uncovers Anka's painful past as an abused orphan in Nazi Germany. Meanwhile, Karen begins to learn more about the cruel, painful world that her family has tried to protect her from, and the forces of oppression she must try to resist. With visual references ranging from the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago (which Karen visits often) to pulpy monster magazines that Karen devours, the illustrations are full of drama and feeling. A single portrait can evoke an entire persona, and though some appear at first grotesque, Ferris draws each character with deep sympathy and warmth. It is hard to think of a library where this book doesn't belong, but it's anarchic visual punch is especially suited to art school libraries, where it can serve as an endless source of inspiration.

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## **My Lesbian Experience with Loneliness**

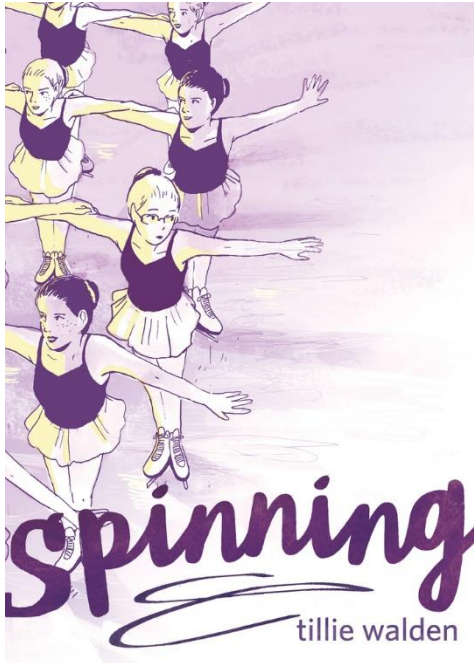
Written by Kabi Nagata  
Translated by Jocelyne Allen  
Adapted by Lianne Sentar  
Lettering and layout by Karis Page  
Cover design by Nicky Lim  
Seven Seas  
[\\$13.99](#)

*My Lesbian Experience with Loneliness* is a frank, autobiographical manga written by Kabi Nagata. Although the narrative begins with Nagata's awkward first sexual encounter, this is not your typical *yuri* (girls' love) coming-of-age romance. The focus of the story is Nagata's difficulties with mental illness, family tensions, and social isolation. This is a frank, introspective, and intimate portrayal of Nagata's journey toward self-acceptance and maturity. The book details the strides she took toward finding a more fulfilling adult life, including her efforts to rehabilitate her mental health and the unique path she chose in exploring her burgeoning sexual feelings.

Nagata's deadpan narrative style, which occasionally comes across as analytical and dissociative, sometimes struggles to communicate the true depth of her feelings. Nevertheless, her story is brave, earnest, and heartfelt. Moreover, it is in the loosely drawn, two-toned chibi-styled (typically short and cute) characters that the real heart of the story lies. When reading the panels, oriented in the traditional Japanese back-to-front, right-to-left, it becomes obvious that the manga's original language, Japanese, is best expressed through illustrations. Her artwork adds a much-needed lightness to the heavy subject matter, while skillfully conveying every ounce of emotion that Nagata was feeling. This is a must have for any library wanting to build a sophisticated LGBTQ manga collection.

Nagata's follow-up novel, *My Solo Exchange Diary Vol. 1: The Sequel to My Lesbian Experience with Loneliness*, was published in English by Seven Seas this year.

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## Spinning

By Tillie Walden

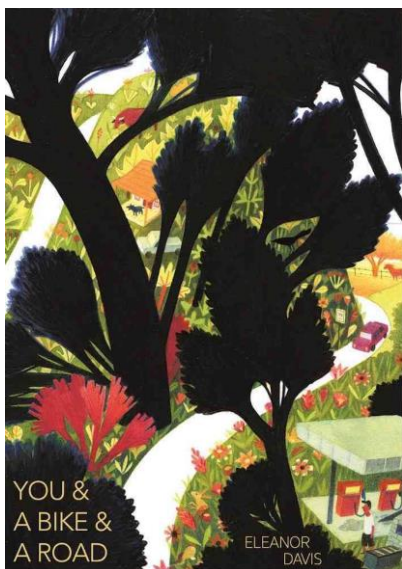
First Second

[\\$17.99](#)

Tillie Walden's graphic memoir *Spinning* details the author's transition from childhood to adolescence. In addition to coming of age changes, young Tillie also moves across the country during the summer between fifth and sixth grade, leaving behind her childhood home in New Jersey for a new home in Texas. Much of the story revolves around her extracurricular ice skating and how her attitudes towards her hobby change as she makes sense of her own identity. Outside of ice skating, Tillie navigates being bullied, falling for her first girlfriend, coming out, figuring out her future ambitions, and fielding unwanted advances.

Walden's writing is very accessible, making this book appealing for adults and teens alike. She switches back and forth between the dialogue of the moment and narration from her future self. As for the art, Walden's line work is clean, her colors are often muted, and both are minimalistic, which makes the images easily readable. One of the highlights of the book was the art at the beginning of each chapter detailing a specific ice skating maneuver and her feelings about it. This book would make an excellent addition to any library with a graphic novel collection, especially those that cater to teenagers and readers with a strong interest in YA, LGBT, or sports literature.

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## You & a Bike & a Road

By Eleanor Davis

Koyama Press

[\\$12.00](#)

*You & a Bike & a Road* by Eleanor Davis is an illustrated journal made by the author during her solo bike trip through the southern United States. Beginning in Tucson, Arizona, Davis sets off for her home in Athens, Georgia. Along the way she records her challenges, which are mental, physical, ethical, social, and sometimes all of the above. Lacking regular human company, Davis turns elements of the road into recurring characters like the wind that either effortlessly guides her forward or else tries to knock her down. Her experiences with people are similarly inconsistent. In Texas, she witnesses a deeply demoralizing incident involving the US Border Patrol and then is taken in by kind strangers less than a week later. These episodes are described in Davis's distinct voice: oddly humorous, poignant, and existential.

While this book is an artistic departure from Davis's usual style (which is vivid and striking, like the cover image), the unfinished pencil sketches and the absence of color create a feeling of intimacy and immediacy. The few pages that contain more detailed drawings have more impact because they aren't often seen. With well-executed visual subtext and the effective use of gestural line, Davis's travel journal makes an engaging narrative. This is a great piece of literary nonfiction for humanities libraries, especially for illustration studies. It would also make a great addition to sociology collections.

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# Appendix: Nominations

Other titles nominated by ARLIS/NA members. Listed alphabetically.

***Anti-Gone***

Connor Willumsen | Koyama Press

***As the Crow Flies***

Melanie Gillman | Iron Circus Comics

***BLACK, Volume 1***

Kwanza Osajyefo, Jamal Igle, Robin Riggs, Tim Smith III, Khary Randolph, and Derwin Roberson | Black Mask Comics

***Black Panther: The Complete Collection, Volume 1***

Reginald Hudlin, Peter Milligan, John Romita, Jr., Trevor Hairsine, David Yardin, Scott Eaton, Kaare Andrews, Salvador Larroca, and Klaus Janson | Marvel

***California Dreamin': Cass Elliot before The Mamas & the Papas***

Pénélope Bagieu and Nanette McGuinness | First Second

***Crawl Space***

Jesse Jacobs | Koyama Press

***Everything is Flammable***

Gabrielle Bell | Uncivilized Books

***Fante Bukowski Two***

Noah Van Sciver | Fantagraphics

***Fetch: How a Bad Dog Brought Me Home, A Graphic Memoir***

Nicole J. Georges | Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

***Fire !!: The Zora Neale Hurston Story***

Peter Bagge | Drawn & Quarterly

***The Flintstones, Volume 1***

Mark Russell, Steve Pugh, Chris Chuckry, and Dave Sharpe | DC Comics

***The Forever War***

Joe W. Haldeman, Marvano, Gay Haldeman, and Cat Connery | Titan Comics

***Going into Town: A Love Letter to New York***

Roz Chast | Bloomsbury

***I Am Alfonso Jones***

Tony Medina, Stacey Robinson, and John Jennings | Lee & Low Books

***My Brother's Husband***

Gengoroh Tagame and Anne Ishii | Pantheon Graphic Novels

***No Small Plans***

Gabrielle H. Lyon, Devin Mawdsley, Kayce Bayer, Chris Lin, and Deon Reed | Chicago Architecture Foundation

***One More Year***

Simon Hanselmann | Fantagraphics

***Pashmina***

Nidhi Chanani | First Second

***Playground of My Mind***

Julia Jacquette | Prestel

***Poorcraft: The Funnybook Fundamentals of Living Well on Less***

C. Spike Trotman and Diana Nock | Iron Circus Comics

***Poppies of Iraq***

Brigitte Findakly, Lewis Trondheim, and Helge Dascher | Drawn & Quarterly

***Pretending is Lying***

Dominique Goblet and Sophie Yanow | New York Review Comics

→

***Ravina the Witch?***

Junko Mizuno | Titan Comics

***Rise of the Dungeon Master: Gary  
Gygax and the Creation of D & D***

David Kushner and Koren Shadmi | Nation  
Books

***Run For It: Stories of Slaves Who  
Fought For Their Freedom***

Marcelo D'Saete, Andrea Rosenberg, and  
Kristy Valenti | Fantagraphics

***Spaniel Rage***

Vanessa Davis | Drawn & Quarterly