



The House that Groaned

Karrie Fransman

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Introducing a fresh, utterly original voice in the graphic novel world

Exploring bodies and the spaces they inhabit, this tale is set in an old Victorian tenement housing six lonely individuals who could only have stepped out of the pages of a comic book. There is the retoucher who cannot touch, a grandmother who literally blends into the background, and a 20-something guy who's sexually attracted to diseased women. Yet, as we learn the stories behind these extreme characters, it becomes apparent that we may share similar issues—as individuals and as a society.

The House that Groaned Details

Date : Published April 1st 2014 by Random House UK (first published January 5th 2012)

ISBN : 9780224086813

Author : Karrie Fransman

Format : Paperback 208 pages

Genre : Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, Comics, Fiction, Graphic Novels Comics

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From Reader Review The House that Groaned for online ebook

George Marshall says

Nice ideas, some good writing, but ultimately let down by clunky art.

Talking about the different lives of people in a divided building works very nicely as a graphic novel. Even though Eisner got there first and Chris Ware has done great work on this theme, there's plenty of opportunity for new takes. This story adds new elements of fantasy, perversion and mystery to the mix. And the art plays around nicely with the feeling of looking into a dollhouse- especially the very enticing cut away cover.

But in the end I could not overcome my dislike of the bizarre mannerism of Fransman's cartooning style especially the triangular noses and balloon cheeks on all the characters which looks sloppy and immature. Comics need good character illustration before they can sing, however good the writing.

somuchreading says

Αυτ? το κ?μικς το ?πιασα στα χ?ρια μου επειδ? ?χει ωρα?ο εξ?φυλλο. Θα μπορο?σα β?βαια να θαυμ?σω μ?νο το εξ?φυλλο του και να τελει?σει εκε? η δουλει?.

Το σχ?διο του The House that Groaned δεν ε?ναι του γο?στου μου. Τα παρ?ξενα πρ?σωπα, η ?λλειψη στη λεπτομ?ρεια, τα λιγ?κι πειραγμ?να χρ?ματα, για μ?να δεν.

Αλλ? εντ?ξει, δε θα κολλ?σουμε στο σχ?διο αν η ιστορ?α, ξ?ρετε, *βγ?ζει κ?που*. Κι εν? οι χαρακτ?ρες του δεν ε?ναι κακο?, μοι?ζουν ελ?χιστα δουλεμ?νοι και αποσπασματικο?, σα να βλ?πεις ?να 13ο επεισ?διο της δε?τερης σεζ?ν εν?ς network drama, σ?γουρα υπ?ρχουν περισσ?τερα στους ?διους και στην πλοκ? αλλ? εσ? απλ? παρακολουθε?ς μια στιγμ? τους/της που δε σε αφ?νει ιδια?τερα να ευχαριστηθε?ς, ?τσι αποκομμ?να, το τι συμβα?νει.

Επ?σης νομ?ζω ?ταν ?να τσικ παραπ?νω, εχμ, αν?ητο για τα δικ? μου γο?στα. Και μου αρ?σουν πολ? τα αν?ητα πρ?γματα.

Σε αυτ? το σημει?ο να πω ?να ευχαριστ? στα βιβλιοπωλε?α που επιτρ?πουν το να διαβ?ζεις μ?σα στο κατ?στημα χωρ?ς να αγορ?σεις και σκ?τωσα καμι? ωρ?τσα εκε?νη τη μ?ρα, μπρ?βο, στηρ?ζω.

The House that Groaned: ★★

Thomas Hale says

Graphic novel about a creaky old house and its strange tenants. There's a woman who runs a weight-loss group who is menaced by midnight phonecalls; a man sexually obsessed with illness and disfigurement; a woman who is invisible. The stories told overlap with each other in vignettes and flashbacks full of misfortune, misery and disappointment. A major recurring theme is women's bodies and the fears and pleasures of them. While Fransman's storytelling is good and her command of the comic panels works

well...the art itself is ugly and drab. It looks like a cheap newspaper comic, even when coupled with more ambitious framing or complex visuals. If you can get past the artwork, though, there are some good little character pieces in here.

Yan says

This book is really original and special, the drawing style is eccentric and the stories are very interesting. The drawing looks simple but is actually highly intelligent and expressive. The story (bunch of intertwined stories) is kind of grotesque and the ending not so happy, but still touching and interesting. I don't know why it got so many negative comments in some of the reviews.

René says

The stories were boring and the characters were not interesting. The only one I liked was Mrs. Durbach and I felt like her story was given the least amount of time.

Stewart Tame says

This attractively packaged graphic novel--I love the die-cut cover!--tells the story of six apartments, and the people who live in them. Their stories intertwine in interesting and unpredictable ways. This was pleasant enough, if not particularly memorable. The characters were interesting and fun, but ultimately this is pretty much an exercise in storytelling with intertwined narratives. You read it, not for the story, but the way the story is told. Fransman has an interesting, slightly abstract art style, sort of like a toned-way-down version of Mary Fleener. This was fun and all, just kind of inconsequential.

Joey Alison Sayers says

[where a character is revealed to be transgender and then is summarily and gruesomely murdered essentially destroyed any positive thoughts I had for this book. (hide spoiler)]

Hans says

I love the cover design and the pages that lean into the architecture of the house. The characters and their stories are extreme and often grotesque, but somehow come across as very human. Fransman gives us a strange tale, that has a major impact on our characters, but then slides into obscurity in the context of the larger world--at least how the larger world appears in the end papers of the book.

Drea Razer says

Weirdly wonderful graphic novel about the unique inhabitants of 6 apartments. I won't say too much. It's a book where you'll spend most of it wondering what's going on, and at the end you'll wonder what exactly it is you just read. But I was still thinking this book hours after I finished it. The characters are memorable and the tragedies of their lives will stay with you.

MJ Nicholls says

For fans of grotesque Steadmanesque drawings and corporeal Selfian humour, Fransman's GN debut will produce squeamish laughs from the darkest nodes of your oesophagus. Like Chris Ware's *Building Stories* in that the book takes place in a tenement building and shows the lives of various inhabitants therein and the history of the building itself, *House That Groaned* is less concerned with hitting universal notes of loneliness and sadness and more concerned with squeezing laughs from a man who dates the disfigured, an obese socialite who stages bacchanalian food orgies, a m-to-f transsexual who is gored through a coffeetable moments before humping her true love, and a landlady who shapeshifts into cabinets and sofas. For a debut work (endorsed, inexplicably, by Nic Roeg who made *Don't Look Now*—an uncle or something?) this is the product of a dangerous comic mind verging on the sadistic, but grotesque nihilism always has a place in the world because sometimes the human race ain't worth redeeming. Especially when grownups use non-words like 'ain't' in reviews and expect to get away with it. Liked this.

Lotte says

I read this a couple of weeks ago and I'm still not sure what I think of it. It's quite an odd, and often grotesque, story about people's dark sides and their odd tastes. It's about an old victorian house where people rent apartments, and it starts with a young woman moving in. Every character is strange and we get flashbacks as to *why* they're so strange and then everything.. collapses. I can't even find the right words to describe it, it's so, so strange but still, very interesting, but it's not going to be everyone's cup of tea. I'm still not sure if it was mine, to be honest.

Donna says

I haven't read many graphic novels because I'm really not a fan, so I wasn't sure about weighing in on this. But then I read one that really moved me (see next review). I see now why it is such an exacting genre. There are words and there are pictures. Ideally, the words and the pictures work together to tell a story that just words, or just pictures won't tell. When I was young, I saw this lovely synergy come about in numerous beautifully inked superhero comics where characters came to life through the draughtsman's command of composition, shadow and body language. And the dialogue was there too as part of the whole design. I had no interest in stupid super heroes but they made me be interested. I enjoyed the drawing and lettering of love comics too. I get what Roy Lichtenstein saw in them. I also loved the visual plainsong of classic comics, so neatly drawn, the colours slightly browned, their stand-offish lettering filling enormous speech balloons. And don't get me started on Edward Gorey. Swoon!

Unfortunately, 'The House That Groaned' has none of this magic. The artwork is too clunky for me to enjoy.

It's all done in a series of monochrome blue-greens where the darks and lights fight each other rather than coalesce. It's like a book full of drawings of people by someone who hates to draw people. Most of the frames suffer from poor composition which makes them confusing and hard to 'read'. This is a form of storytelling that needs a cinematographer's editing eye to get to the kernel of every frame. Think of Vittorio Storaro's highly populated scenes in 'The Last Emperor' and how the eye is never confused because he composes the frame for clarity first, letting the beauty, tragedy, or ugliness follow.

There's a scene in this book where schoolgirls tear off their clothes and dance around naked at boarding school. It's one of the better moments where the frames come together enough to sing a bit. And yet, I recently came across a similar sequence in 'Skippy Dies' by Paul Murray. No pictures, just a white page of words that make me feel the heat of the gym while my eyes water from the smell of hormones and Axe. In this book neither the pictures nor the words quite do this, jointly or severally.

Becky says

In short: this wasn't what I expected and not in a good way.

Perhaps I misunderstood the synopsis or maybe it was that the synopsis was worded poorly which allowed for multiple interpretations and made me, in a roundabout way, misunderstand what this graphic novel was going to be and was supposed to be. I went into it expecting quirkiness, of course, as the illustrations highly hinted at the fact that this wasn't going to be a conventional book. The illustrations drew me in and ended up making this somewhat successful for me, but the words themselves are what let this down massively. I feel like it had so much potential but its execution was inherently poor and this made it ultimately fall down. It's always disappointing when expectations aren't met and my hopes were completely dashed with this as I feel like there was so much that it could've been and yet not much that it ended up being.

The plot didn't make sense, the characters were flat, the setting was dry, the whole piece as a whole was incredibly deflating and there wasn't much to pull it back to being remotely decent opposed to the illustrations themselves, which is why I rated it two stars - the art style was irresistible, quirky, and generally unlike anything I've seen before in anything of this nature. I do feel like if it had been padded out correctly, it would've offered so much more! I think it had so much to give but little chance to deliver, and that's endlessly disappointing.

Despite it not being what I wanted, or expected, I would still recommend you to check this out - whether for the art style itself or whether the plot draws you in. It's an incredibly quick read so you can't really go wrong with giving it a go. I still think it's worth a gander at, even if I didn't pull anything particularly lasting from it.

Sam Quixote says

The book follows the lives of the 6 inhabitants of a nondescript, old Victorian house on a place called Rottin Road. One is a cosmetics saleswoman who's recently moved into town, another is an odd fellow who touches up photos of models, one is a diet consultant, one is a man who only loves women with disease or

disfigurement, one is a homebody, and one is a hedonist. Their lives intertwine and the reader slowly gets to know each of the characters' strange pasts and how they became the people they are today.

Karrie Fransman's debut comic book is an oddball story that starts slow and builds gradually to a rollicking pace, completely enrapturing the reader into its fantastic story. I thought each character was well written and completely fascinating. What you quickly realise when you read it is that no-one is as they seem and the flashbacks to the characters' pasts shine light on new elements to their person that completely change the way you view them.

Fransman draws the characters as kind of bizarrely warped humans with doll/marionette-like faces, all circles, but she is still able to convey expressions and emotions through these faces while retaining a unique look to other comics out there. I particularly liked how she drew the old lady at the top floor who stayed in all day - she's drawn as a literal homebody where her body is moulded into the furniture she's standing next to/sitting on at that moment.

"The House That Groaned" is an original, well written, and completely enrapturing read that deserves a wide audience. I loved it and highly recommend anyone who enjoys contemporary comics to seek it out.

Lauren says

What a weird and wonderful book!!!

The House that Groaned is a refreshing, and often, grotesque commentary on society and the strange beings who inhabit it. We follow a woman whose unhealthy relationship with food consumes her life, a man who is attracted to diseased and deformed women, a man who longs for a relationship with someone real as opposed to the models whose photos he retouches, a new female lodger who we learn isn't quite what she seems and an elderly woman who blends in with her surroundings.

Most of these characters typify social norms; for example, there is a lot of emphasis on appearance and image in contemporary society, and in order to achieve the 'desired' look, most people resort to manipulating their eating habits. Janet is a formerly larger female who denies herself treats in order to remain thin. We can see that she isn't happy, and her continual calorie counting takes over her life becoming a borderline obsession. Fransman contrasts her with Marion who is a larger woman and proud of the excesses she indulges in. We see that Janet and Marion are two opposite ends of the scale - neither one of them is happy deep down, and we come to learn that their upbringing influenced the people they have become.

Fransman cleverly addresses the Nature vs Nurture debate in her book and asks the question: are we who we are because of genetics or are we products of our environments? I think in the case of The House that Groaned, our environments are pivotal factors which shape and mould us into the adults we become.

And then there is Brian who is attracted to women of all shapes and sizes with diseases/disfigurements. His back story is a little more opaque, although we come to learn that as a child he was diagnosed with Meningococcal meningitis. What I believe Fransman is trying to emphasise is the understanding one diseased person has for another, and how they have an affinity through their diseases, almost like a linchpin connecting them together.

Matt is the guy who retouches models' photographs and who continually strives for perfection; perfection in

his work, in the models themselves and in the world around him. He meets Barbara, the newest resident, and immediately takes a shine to her - she is attractive, in proportion and perfectly sculpted. We later learn that Barbara wasn't born a female, she was actually a boy named Peter, and in her own endeavour to achieve perfection and be accepted/wanted by society, changed gender resulting in a sculpted body, a sculpted body lusted after by Matt.

And finally we meet Demi Durbach, a lady who has lived within the confines of her apartment for so long that she literally blends in with her furnishings. This is a very real and prevalent topic affecting mostly elderly people who feel that they cannot go out in society because society has either changed too much for them and they no longer recognise the society they once was a part of, or they feel ostracised/a burden to society. Despite this character being a background one (no pun intended) it was quite possibly the story which affected and moved me the most - a melancholic story of an elderly woman trying to reintegrate herself back in society.

The story ends rather grotesquely, a lot of people die in horrific ways or end up in unpleasant situations, but for me there is an honesty and a justness to the book - most of these residents are too wrapped up in their own sins to notice the wider world hence why their obsessions become their own undoing.

And of course, let's not forget about the street where they all live - Rottin Road. I think the name speaks for itself; some of them are rotting from the outside in, while others are rotting from the inside out, and a few are just plain rotten.

The illustrations are perfect, using a minimal and subdued colour scheme to encapsulate the fact that actions speak louder than words. Fransman focuses on the behaviour of the characters within a compact space and by using natural colours, does not dilute or impair the honesty and grittiness of her portrayal of real life.

This book is about a handful of flawed people, or if you prefer, misfits, whose unhealthy and unnatural obsessions make *The House that Groaned* a compelling, unusual and utterly memorable book. If you want to read something different, thought-provoking and ferociously honest, then this book is definitely for you!
