



The Acme Novelty Library #19

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The penultimate teen issue of the *ACME Novelty Library* appears this autumn with a new chapter from the electrifying experimental narrative “Rusty Brown,” which examines the life, work, and teaching techniques of one of its central real-life protagonists, W. K. Brown. A previously marginal figure in the world of speculative fiction, Brown’s widely anthologized first story, “The Seeing Eye Dogs of Mars,” garnered him instant acclaim and the coveted White Dwarf Award for Best New Writer when it first appeared in the pages of *Nebulous* in the late 1950s, but his star was quickly eclipsed by the rise of such talents as Anton Jones, J. Sterling Imbroglio, and others of the so-called psychovisionary movement. (Modern scholarship concedes, however, that they now owe a not inconsequential aesthetic debt to Brown.) New surprises and discoveries concerning the now legendarily reclusive and increasingly influential writer mark this nineteenth number of the *ACME Novelty Library*, itself a regular award-winning periodical, lauded for its clear lettering and agreeable coloring, which, as any cultured reader knows, are cornerstones of any genuinely serious literary effort. Full color, seventy-eight pages, with hardbound covers, full indicia, and glue, the *ACME Novelty Library* offers its readers a satisfying, if not thrilling, rocket ride into the world of unkempt imagination and pulse-pounding excitement.

The Acme Novelty Library #19 Details

Date : Published October 28th 2008 by Drawn and Quarterly

ISBN : 9781897299562

Author : Chris Ware

Format : Hardcover 80 pages

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

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From Reader Review The Acme Novelty Library #19 for online ebook

Christine says

4.5.

Allen says

Chris Ware is the king of what he does, and this book lives up to any expectation. The usual absurdly-high level of detail in the art and the usual painfully depressing story lines, beautifully presented.

Lee says

Self-sufficient sci-fi layercake. First comes a pulpy outerspace adventure, then it's all about how the young Rusty Brown became interested in science fiction, finished with a sci-fi textual short story by Rusty Brown. Not quite at the level of #18 or #20 but still wholly worth reading. Surprising: occasional tiny, sexually explicit/suggestive images. I can see how some get tired of Ware's loveable losers. The girl in #18, young Rusty in this one, and Jimmy Corrigan are all sort of cut from the same Charlie Brownian cloth, except the girl in #18, young Rusty, and Lint all turn to art in response to a sense that the world's rejected them. The graphic approach, more than the characters, is what does it for me. This one seemed a bit more traditionally framed than the wholly Warean whole-page cycling schematics of association in Lint and #18. 4.1 stars maybe?

Chris says

Chris Ware is my favorite comic artist/author. It might be because he writes so often and so well about Chicago, my life-long home, but apart from this i love his grim narratives that emphasize the rare hopeful ray of light by the horror of the surrounding story. It probably goes without saying that his visual style is another huge component of his appeal as an artist, embracing everything from classic comic-strip composition to commercial design to unite the storytelling and purely visual elements of his pages in a way that heighten the emotional effect of and often constitute an ironic commentary on his story.

This volume of the ACME Novelty Library presents a story from his ongoing Rusty Brown tale. It's about Rusty's father's career as a journalist in the 1950s, which tanks as he becomes sexually obsessed with a co-worker. The upshot is that because of these dire circumstances he is inspired to write and get published a science fiction story, which forms a large part of the comic. Ware is completely in his element with this (literally) space-age story, which you will be unsurprised to learn is as grim as his usual fare. I really like the palette of colors that Ware uses here; he beautifully contrasts the barren planet of Mars with "real life" Nebraska in summer time, and makes masterful use of black space in depicting the cold isolation of life in a space colony.

The science fiction story is a classic Ware device, mirroring the events of its authors life both in theme and imagery. I remember it well from reading it when it was originally published in the Reader (or was it New City?); so far it's one of my favorite parts of the Rusty Brown saga. Isolation on a Martian colony is an obvious metaphor for Rusty's father's inability to relate to his peers and his lack of success at work, but it's the wealth of detail about life in the small colony that so effectively characterizes Rusty's dad as a social failure and makes the story (both stories, i guess) so tragic and convincing.

It might be disappointing to some that Ware is sticking to his guns when it comes to his style; he hasn't made any radical changes since his classic *Jimmy Corrigan* . But what he is doing is slowly refining his craft, and i really appreciate the mastery that he's achieved in this medium. This volume is an excellent example of his accomplishment.

Ariel says

God I love this.

Joey says

Another really good edition from Chris Ware. Not quite as good as Acme Novelty Library #18 (a definite 5 starer) but still very..."entertaining". Ware always taps into something about human nature that makes you feel creepy about existence or about some darkside that you possess even if you just have a small hint of that characteristic in you. The first part of this edition to the Acme Novelty library gave me that exact same feeling I get when I wake up 3 AM and think "one day I will be dead and no longer exist" and "we live in a really HUGE universe that probably has nothing else living in it". The second part of the book made me feel just a slight bit perverted for liking adult-oriented comics.

Earline says

Amazing as always. I absolutely loved the first story in the collection. I'm still shocked by the back cover.. didn't know Chris Ware had it in him. way to tell it like it is.

Neven says

An amazing story somewhat burdened by moments of discomfort and sheer misery. I'm sure Ware achieves exactly what he aims to, but I'm still wondering if his pervasive disappointment in humanity is worth drinking up in large quantities, no matter how beautifully he packages it.

D.M. says

Sometimes I feel I take Chris Ware for granted. Though I can't see myself ever giving a book of his less than

4 stars here, just on the merits of craftsmanship and storytelling evident in everything he does, it's not often I'm completely awed by the totality of a single one of his books. This time out is clearly different. From the start of book 19, it's clear we're in for something a little out of the ordinary of the more recent Acme books. We're launched straight into a space opera involving settlers on Mars, 'The Seeing-Eye Dogs of Mars.' On its own, this is a terrific story, full of the bleak outlook we've come to expect from Ware, but it's taken to another level with the continuation/explanation into Rusty Brown: Youth, and Middle Age. This is not exactly a chapter in the Rusty Brown story, but rather the story of his father 'Woody,' the authour of the Mars story.

This part of the book focuses mainly on Woody's early days in Omaha, and what would prove the inspiration for his sole published output, framed as reminiscence by his older self (as father to Rusty and teacher at a high school). Needless to say, it's not a nice story, and at times more than a little puzzling, but that's what we've come to expect from Ware.

The volume wraps up with the short prose 'Syzygy,' a 'lost' story from Brown, from a VERY small print-run magazine in the 70s. It's another brilliantly constructed science fiction, echoing the obsession that built the Mars story as well.

This is a beautifully made story, in the usual stunning Ware 'package.' If it has a single flaw, it's the uncharacteristically overt political statement made in a parodic ad on the back cover; it's out of place here, but an interesting look at what else Ware does with his time.

J says

Good god this one was bleak and beautiful. You see a character that looks rather funny and laugh when other characters laugh at him, and then Ware takes you inside that character and you're just completely wrecked.

Paul says

The third chapter of Ware's ongoing novel *Rusty Brown*. After two slow introductory chapters, the narrative takes off, with Ware producing an ambitious and virtuosic work that takes on the Golden Age of Science Fiction in addition to Ware's customary explorations of loneliness and awkwardness.

The entire first half of the book is given over to a story in the style of 50s sci-fi magazines. A man is alone on Mars with his old dog, a decaying rocketship, and a house that he constantly visits, but never enters. The story unfolds with Ware's usual care, but what could be mere pastiche allows Ware to break out of his usual narrative tropes (loneliness, etc.) and tell a heartbreaking, disturbing story of alienation. The second half of the book reveals in detail how this story-within-a-story came to be, as the reader is taken back to the fifties to follow young Woody Brown, new to the "big city" of Omaha as he's in turn seduced and emotionally tortured by a woman in his office. Too emotionally immature to deal with his infatuation in a proper manner, Woody throws himself into his old science fiction magazines, managing to pen a story that could be the start of a promising career. But his life continues to fall apart, and before he even knows it, this young, overly sensitive young man has become the bitter, pathetic figure we saw in the first two chapters, a teacher who spends all of his time ruining his lost chances in life and as a result failing to be a good husband or an even adequate father to his son Rusty.

While treading familiar themes, this chapter still marks a significant step forward in Ware's career. I can't wait to see where he goes from here.

Damian Mxyzptlk says

Such a polarizing book for me. I loved the first part - really enjoyed the art and design, thought the story was interesting and engaging... I was enchanted. And then came Jimmy Corrigan #2. I really appreciate the brilliant way Ware uses the medium, and his sense of cinematographic narration. But when the first part of the book was over, it was suddenly just more of the exact things that made Jimmy Corrigan such a depressing slog of a read. To me it is the same character dealing with almost identical issues - self-doubt, complete lack of self-esteem, and unhealthy relationship. I realise that it's not the same character, but I just don't see enough of a difference to justify further exploration of these issues. I am willing to give Novelty Library another try (the graphic design is impeccable), but at this point I'm afraid that Ware will become another Murakami for me - doing the same thing over and over again without much innovation beyond what first put them in the spotlight. And honestly, I don't think we need another self-centered white guy with problems, there's already too many of them in pop culture. If Ware applied his skills to an original story it would be for the best. As it is, I want to look for another sample and then decide if I will read him again.

Adam says

A meticulous and anxious evocation of social dysfunction! Which *is* what Ware usually does, but I think this offering of his 'Acme Novelty Library' series is especially gratifying due to its structure, through which a 1970s sci-fi story is nested within a contemporaneous tale of Mr. William (Woody) Brown, young reporter in charge of the obituaries and author of the story within the story. This structure transforms the work into an exercise in selective memory and authorial bias, as we the readers catch the telling differences between sci-fi fantasy and the banal reality of its author. As ever, Ware is a formidable formalist, with an architectural skill for presenting the layouts of buildings and how they determine our social interactions. The colour in the comic is also gorgeous and Ware seems to be increasingly playing around with contrast and primary colours in a way unforeseen in his breakout work 'Jimmy Corrigan - The Smartest Kid on Earth'. I've read reviews critiquing the work for being "dour" and for once again focusing on a white, male, nebbish protagonist. Truthfully there is a familiarity about all this, but it would be wrong to accuse Ware of sticking to what he knows - previous editions of the Acme Novelty Library have dealt with childhood and #18 with the experienced of a young woman with a disability. The main departure in #19 is not in the characters that Ware is dealing with, but the genre and it is very exciting to see him tackle sci-fi in a way which is both parodic, affectionate and genuinely chilling. His interest in topography means that we get a real sense of the 'lie of the land' in the Mars sequences and this interest serves him well when the story becomes one of territory and borders crossed by an increasingly disturbing protagonist who seems to embody the shadow side of Mr. Brown. However, to continue would be to reveal too much. Needless to say, this is a remarkably work of fine and assured craftsmanship, clever panel transitions and a pessimistic, but not unsentimental humour. It is a remarkable thing.

Laura says

Every single thing Chris Ware has done is moving and heartbreaking genre-defying and genius.

Amy Gardiner says

The Seeing Eye Dogs of Mars is jaw dropping horror as only Chris Ware can deliver. Your heart will sink as you read Youth, and Middle Age. By the time you read SYZYGY you will be numb.

I love a good story that is heavily depressing, leaving your heart gaping. It's such an emotional drain that leaves you empty. 5 stars!
