



# Gunnerkrigg Court, Vol. 1: Orientation

*Thomas Siddell*

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## **Gunnerkrigg Court, Vol. 1: Orientation** Thomas Siddell

Antimony Carver is a precocious and preternaturally self-possessed young girl starting her first year of school at gloomy Gunnerkrigg Court, a very British boarding school that has robots running around along side body-snatching demons, forest gods, and the odd mythical creature. The opening volume in the series follows Antimony through her orientation year: the people she meets, the strange things that happen, and the things she causes to happen as she and her new friend, Kat, unravel the mysteries of the Court and deal with the everyday adventures of growing up. Tom Siddell's popular and award-winning web comic ([www.gunnerkrigg.com](http://www.gunnerkrigg.com)) is here collected in print for the first time.

## **Gunnerkrigg Court, Vol. 1: Orientation Details**

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Author : Thomas Siddell

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# From Reader Review *Gunnerkrigg Court*, Vol. 1: Orientation for online ebook

## Kathryn says

I don't usually read graphic novels, but I really liked the sound of this one and it received such a glowing review from one of my GoodReads friends that I couldn't resist, especially since parts of it fit in nicely around Halloween (the book has nothing to do with Halloween but a few of the characters and scenarios are a little spooky/mysterious). Unfortunately, I didn't have as much time to read this as I planned to and had to wait several weeks between reading the first half and the second half. Thus, I think a few things weren't totally clear but I will chalk this up to my hiatus rather than any fault of the author. There is a great deal of humor and wit and some very charming scenes along with some more mysterious-- a bit of the occult, a bit of steampunk-y robot stuff, new twists on traditional "magical creatures" like faeries, all tied together in a boarding school setting. The characters, especially the two main friends, Kat and Annie, really stand out and the art is a treat. All in all, very enjoyable.

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## Chad says

Antimony Carver is sent to an odd school supposedly for science. But fairies, dragons and demons and other magical elements soon raise their heads. This reminds me a lot of Harry Potter if JJ Abrams had gotten a hold of it. There is mystery box after mystery box introduced but we don't get any answers in this volume. The writing is a little all over the map too. But this was originally a web comic so hopefully this will become more focused. The relationship between Antimony and her best friend Kat is pretty great. I did like it well enough to move onto book two.

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## David says

This is the first collected volume of the popular web comic *Gunnerkrigg Court*. I had never read the web comic before, and only picked this book up because I happened to see it sitting on a shelf in the library and I had heard of the web comic. Yeah, some of my reads are totally random like that.

*Gunnerkrigg Court* is a Hogwarts-like private school somewhere in Britain, surrounded by a mysterious forest that contains everything from robot parrots to ghosts and faeries to the trickster god Coyote. The main character is a girl named Antimony Carver, who bears enough similarities to Harry Potter for the resemblance to be more than coincidental. The students at *Gunnerkrigg Court* are not wizards, though there's enough magic and technology floating around that hardly anyone can be assumed to be a "Muggle."

That this started as an amateur web comic shows - the art is not bad, though certainly nothing remarkable, manga-inspired like all the kids are drawing these days. The setting is full of everything and the kitchen sink, and while Siddell seems to be doing a lot of worldbuilding here, it's not clear how much is planned and how much was "Hey, robot parrots! And... and a demon trapped in the body of a stuffed animal! And... tree-spirit-things..." and whatever else crossed his mind.

However, he's certainly working on some long-term plotlines. A lot of characters are established, most of

whom have some history with Antimony's parents. (Antimony's mother is dead and her father has Mysteriously Vanished.)

This volume tells the story of Antimony's first year, at the end of which hardly any of the many mysteries raised have been answered. We have little idea about the whos, whats, or whys of all the weirdness.

The reason I liked it enough to consider reading on is the chemistry between the two girl characters: Antimony and her best friend Kat. Kat is a dorky scientific genius and the emotional counterpart to Antimony's cool, almost humorless demeanor. The two of them are both quite charming in their own way, and if there is one thing Sidwell gets right, it's their friendship. That and the fact that I'd like to see if the author really has worked out some grand, overarching metaplot he's going to bring to fruition, since he's clearly mining J.K. Rowling territory.

3.5 stars. The art is only so-so; the setting and story is disorganized but interesting, and the characters are cute.

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### **Stewart Tame says**

Oh yes! This is an amazingly good series. Excellent fantasy, but not the typical dragons and swords stuff that most people think of when they hear the term. Reading this, I get the same thrill of discovery that I got reading Neil Gaiman for the first time. Antimony Carver is a student at Gunnerkrigg Court, a school seemingly devoted to the sciences, but with some hidden secrets. Make that a LOT of hidden secrets. The school is a sprawling, maze-like building seemingly surrounded by a vast forest, and it soon becomes apparent that the creatures of the forest seem to be at war with the Court. And there's magic. And robots. And fairies. And ghosts. And Coyote. Yes. THAT Coyote. This is excellent work that everybody should be reading. Neil Gaiman fans will kick themselves for not reading this sooner ... if they're not already reading it that is. So good!

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### **K. O'Bibliophile says**

Gorgeous colors! Fun characters! An interesting and very intriguing setting! Humor! Sarcasm! Free to read online as well! You have no excuse not to be reading Gunnerkrigg Court.

GK is one of my favorite webcomics ([www.gunnerkrigg.com](http://www.gunnerkrigg.com)) and the first 14 chapters are compiled in this beautiful hardback. I hadn't read it for a while, but I love how this balances beautifully between having an overarching story and making individual chapters a little episodic.

I love art, and it was fun to watch Tom Siddell's style change even within the first few chapters. The only thing I was a little disappointed with was the lack of any extras--early character design sketches, maybe, or a one-page comic; something that you can't get online as a little bonus. Still, with a story this good, it really doesn't need anything else.

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## **Miriam says**

Monsters! Robots! Ghosts! Mythical creatures of all sorts! Challenging coursework! Awesomeness! Also, free!

[http://www.gunnerkrigg.com/archive\\_pa...](http://www.gunnerkrigg.com/archive_pa...)

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## **Mike says**

This volume collects the first fourteen chapters of the webcomic Gunnerkrigg Court.

Antimony Carver has just started school midway through first year at Gunnerkrigg Court, which feel more like an industrial complex run amuck with creatures and oddities of all sorts than a school per se. This volume follows her early school experiences, including finding a best friend, some potential enemies, and a lot of unanswered questions.

The comic gets off to a very odd start. The first chapter just kind of throws a bunch of weird things at the reader in a slightly absurd manner with Antimony appearing to react (or rather not react) in a very unintuitive way. The art also takes some getting used to. It's very good, but has a distinct style and very pronounced angle on faces in partial profile.

But the storytelling smoothes out very quickly. By the third chapter I was completely hooked, and it only gets better from there. Antimony is actually a pretty deep character we're only seeing the surface of, and there are reasons why the weirdness of her new school doesn't phase her as much as we might expect. There are a lot of intriguing interwoven mysteries, the humor is pitch perfect, and the characters and plots are nicely multi-layered.

On top of the quality of the comic itself, the production values of the printed version are incredible. It's a hardbound "regular book sized" edition with excellent paper stock and vivid printing.

Overall Gunnerkrigg Court is phenomenal stuff. Once it gets going it's extremely engaging and lovably quirky and weird. Can't wait to read more.

Highly recommended.

1/29/13

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## **Raina says**

Very smartly written webcomic. Annie and Kat's adventures are very episodic, yet connect and weave and do tell one long story. Basically it's the cartoon-style story of two girls living in a mythical boarding school, rife with dragons, demons, mechanical birds, illusions, and talking shadows. It's a great hodgepodge of things that this author thinks are cool, which roughly correspond to current hot topics. Accessible illustration style, accessible characters, accessible format - they all come together to make this an incredibly accessible tale of some VERY WEIRD THINGS.

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## Lola says

What a mysterious school. Well, this is no Harry Potter for sure, but Gunnerkrigg Court is very much magical also and full of secrets.

I won't lie, I definitely want to enroll in this school. I may be too old, but maybe in another life, who knows. There are robots, ghosts, talking animals, dragons, dragonslayers, demons... I mean, one can only wonder how these all come together...

Well that's what's so peculiar about this graphic novel. It seems as though it's a mix of quite random elements that make this world-building. But somehow... it works. Somehow it's strange, but in a way that makes you eager to read more.

Antimony's mother died, and her mother's last wish was for her to finish her studies at Gunnerkrigg Court. So she is here. And while other students seem to accept the strangeness of this place with a shrug, Antimony is a curious young lady who wants to understand her surroundings. Also, unhuman souls seem to gravitate around her.

This is a story like no other. Seriously, I'm trying hard to connect it to another graphic novel series I have read, or maybe even a book series, but the only one I can loosely relate it to is Harry Potter, and even so, these two are COMPLETELY different works.

(Available online for free as a webcomic: <http://www.gunnerkrigg.com/>)

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## Heidi says

This review was written as a series review for Gunnerkrigg Court:

Holy crap guys. You know when one of your reading buddies pushes something on you and you're all: "Yeah, yeah, I'll get to it when I get to it"? Because maybe, just maybe, sometimes you should get to it faster. Flannery of The Readventurer has been mentioning the web comic turned graphic novel series, Gunnerkrigg Court to me since the turn of the year, and while I think 6 months to actually pick something up and read it isn't bad for my track record, I'm still kicking myself for not doing so sooner. But also praising myself a bit, because let's face it, now I barely have to wait to pick up Volume 4 in a hardcopy as it releases tomorrow!

Gunnerkrigg Court contains so many stunning elements that I'm still a bit slack-jawed over the whole thing. The basic premise is this: Our girl, Antimony, is dumped Pushing Daisies style into a mysteriously massive boarding school known as Gunnerkrigg Court (or just "the Court" as they say on the streets) after her mother passes away. The school has a strong focus on the sciences—a need to explain things—but also a tacit acknowledgement that science may be unable to explain everything. There's a certain air of magic about the place, which Antimony uncovers by coming face to face with the supernatural and the mythological as she

and her friend Kat stumble about the enigmatic world of the Court.

Okay, so, I'm not gonna lie—I was really disappointed at first. Our lead, Antimony, is a total Mary Sue, and I didn't get that in to the first volume. However, it did seem to be setting up for an interesting story arc toward the end, and since they take all of an hour or so to read, I decided to pick up volume two, and fell completely in love. I realized that everything I was a bit ho-hum about in volume one had a reason. Each awkward meeting or item was born of necessity, working to lay the groundwork for what would become a very complex and interwoven tale throughout the following chapters of Antimony's story. I even became so engrossed in finding out the real history of Gunnerkrigg Court and the forest that lays beyond its boundaries that I completely forgot that I hadn't liked Antimony all that much to begin with. There are so many other wonderful characters taking up page room, that you kind of quit caring that she's gorgeous, intelligent, and Practically Perfect in Every Way.

Here's a bit of the awesomeness: Antimony hangs out with Renard (who you may know as the fox), who just happens to be trapped in her stuffed wolf's body and has some anger management issues. Her best friend, Kat, is a veritable genius when it comes to robots. Antimony's pals with a ghost, all the psychopomps, and has potential as a medium. She's also welcome to hang out with Coyote in the forest. Everyone loved her mom, particularly her crush-worthy games teacher. Plus, there's all sorts of magic, mystery, and student mischief to be had. Thomas Siddell has a wonderful humor which he's able to slip into every gap in the story—constantly lightening the mood after a serious scene or making me laugh between chapters. For instance, did you ever need some advice on how to ward off amorous robots?

Oh—and I love the art. Siddell's style changes from the first volume to later installments, and I honestly much preferred the change. I love a very cartoony art style, and have found many panels to be incredibly captivating, fun, and beautiful. His drawing has a humor about it, but also a deep understanding and respect for how these characters would work with the world around them, and how their images should reflect the cultures they represent:

He also does this gorgeous bit with Antimony's hair whenever she's in a dream state that I find breathtaking:

So really. If you enjoy web comics or graphic novels at all, Gunnerkrigg Court is worth checking out. I was able to get the first three volumes from my library, though you can read the entire series online for free [here](#). I have a feeling that once you do, you'll be wanting to support Thomas Siddell by buying merchandise or picking up the graphic novels in hardcopy. While I was initially disappointed, I moved quickly to astounded by how utterly complex and well-plotted this story has been since the beginning. Every time you think a bit of the story is just for fun, or won't have an affect in the future—think again, because it does. I'm a little bit in love with Antimony's world (particularly Renard); the Court is full of mystery, fun, and adventure that will delight readers to no end. At least I hope there's no end...

Original review posted at Bunbury in the Stacks.

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## **Rebecca McNutt says**

With themes similar to the *Harry Potter* book series, *Gunnerkrigg Court* is a spectacular graphic novel with everything from friendship to fantastic mythical creatures. The author's art style is amazing, too. :)

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## **Gwen (The Gwendolyn Reading Method) says**

I liked this. Not sure if I liked it enough to continue on, it's definitely for younger readers, but will definitely be recommending to any kids I come across!

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## **Sesana says**

This is a collection of the first 14 chapters of the online comic Gunnerkrigg Court. I love online comics, they're about the only ones I read anymore. I don't remember now what brought the collected book to my attention, and what made me read the book instead of just going online and reading the comic itself, but I'm glad I did. It's a good presentation. As for the comic itself... Well, I'm working on catching up on it from chapter 15 onwards now. I really like the art style, which has always been important for me in a comic. Ugly and generic art is one of the reasons I've drifted away from comics in the first place. I also like the characters, and the story is shaping up nicely. It was a bit of a hodgepodge of stuff at the start, but it always seemed to work, and it seems like the author has settled in to a story (but still with a lot of nice side stuff).

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## **David Schaafsma says**

I know some of my Goodreads friends and I will have to disagree here, but I—late to this party—am not enthralled by this comics series, originally a web-comic. The story takes place at a British boarding school, Gunnerkrigg Court, a science school where Antimony Carver, whose Mom has just died, is a new student. I love Harry Potter, another British boarding school series, but I am generally not a fantasy fan. This one does have magic and mystery, and robots, and a bff Kat who is kinda cool, but maybe it is because this volume is “orientation” that I am kind of impatient; instead of getting right into a story it is mostly set-up and exposition. And there’s a kind artistic development that goes on from the earlier comics to the later ones, though I am generally not a fan of this cartoonish computer-generated glossy art. Okay, the characters are kinda cute, I guess.

I like how she has a second shadow and her room at school includes an entire meadow. I like it when it seems to indicate it might get a bit darker in tone. Does it, later? Is it worth my time to continue?

Here, you can read it here free online, in case you are intrigued:

[http://www.gunnerkrigg.com/archive\\_pa...](http://www.gunnerkrigg.com/archive_pa...)

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## Michelle Witte says

Originally posted at Libri Ago.

I've been fascinated for a while now with the fusion of text and graphics that comprise graphic novels. The problem I find is that most comics and graphic novels are geared toward a male audience. While it's great that there are books for the numerous guys who are reluctant readers, I wish there were more graphic novels that appealed to women—especially women who are strong, smart, and dress in actual clothes. So I was ecstatic when I found Gunnerkrigg Court, a captivating series of graphic novels for teen girls.

In the first volume, Orientation, Antimony Carver arrives at the gloomy Gunnerkrigg Court, a British boarding school that looks more like a factory than a school. Sounds normal enough, but that illusion fades within the first few pages as strange things start to happen.

Soon enough Antimony discovers that her parents—her mother recently deceased and her father missing—are intricately tied to this school and the mysteries that surround it. Events at Gunnerkrigg may even hold the key to understanding what happened to her parents.

Antimony's world is a dark one populated with robots, demons, and forest gods, but it also one in which she and her pre-teen classmates can still have fun. This isn't a humorous book by any means, but there is a quirkiness to the situations and scenes that give it a certain kind of depth I've only found in graphic novels. The best comparison I can make is to Emily the Strange, another graphic novel series\* I absolutely adore. As with Emily the Strange, there's something youthful but dark about the illustrations that I find fascinating.

While some of the chapters in this volume feel a bit episodic—which makes sense considering the series started out as a web comic—enough of the the overarching plot threads are woven throughout that it all fits together well.

This volume ends much like the Harry Potter books: at the end of the school year but with enough mystery to propel readers immediately into the next book.

\* There is a series of books for teens featuring Emily the Strange that are mainly text-based but with graphic elements. The original graphic novels are much darker, though just as compelling, and fit more into the traditional comic style.

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