

GRAPHIC NOVEL REVIEW

**THE COMPLETE CHRIS WARE PAIN-THOLOGY**  
by Chris Ware • \$39.95, Fanboygraviditas Publishing

Chris Ware is the man of the moment in alternative comics. Ware's won every possible cartooning award. The Eisner! The Harvey! The Guisewite! He's a much sought-after graphic designer. His work has been displayed in various museums. Needless to say, he portrays himself as a self-doubting failure.

*The Complete Chris Ware Pain-thology* begins with Quimby the Mouse, who is best described as a happy-go-lucky Fleischer cartoon character with inoperable liver cancer. The wordless strips capture Quimby in the acts of suffering, weeping, regretting, and applying ointment. Plans for an animated version fell through when Danish director Lars von Trier decided the premise was "a little too depressing" for Scandinavian cinema.

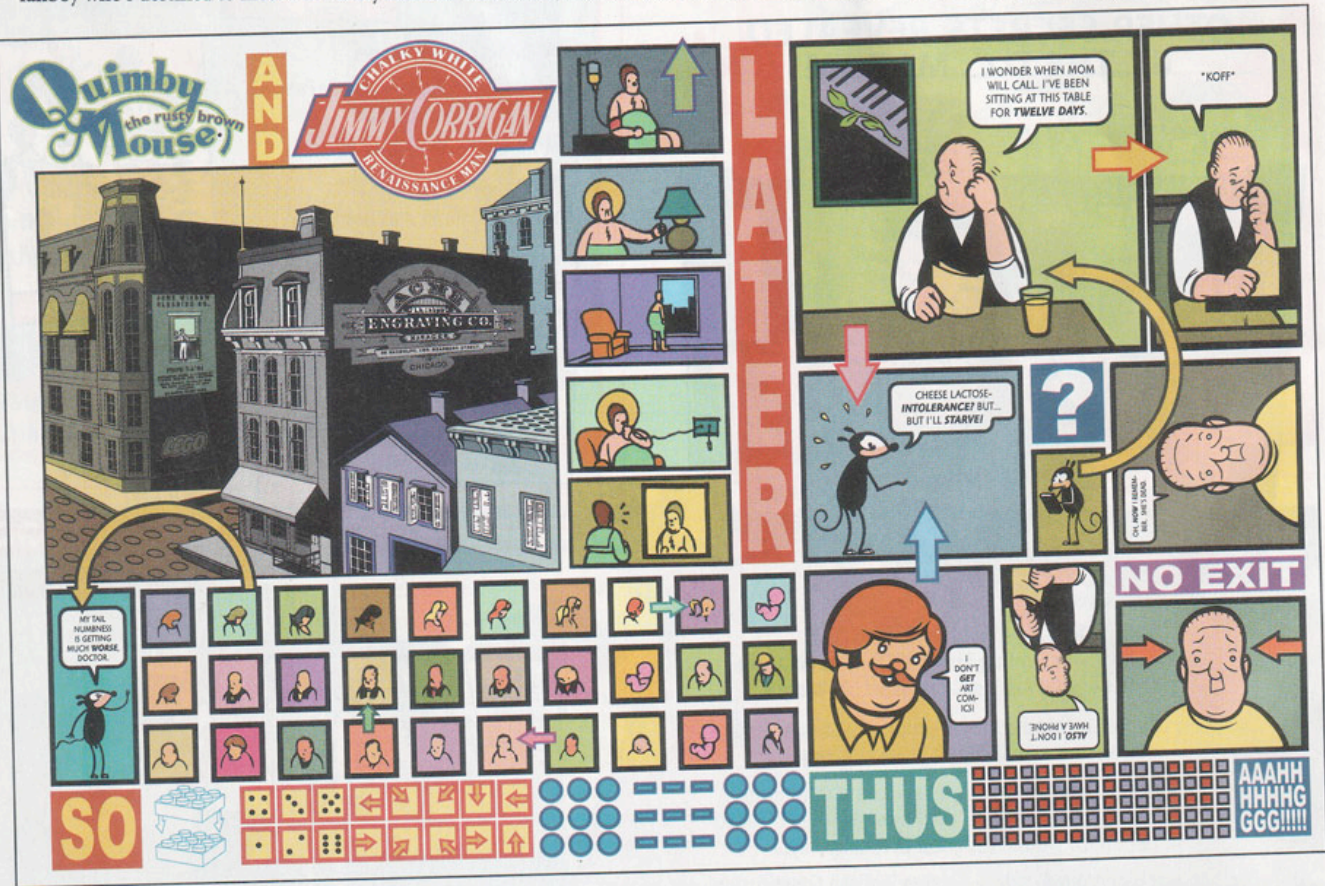
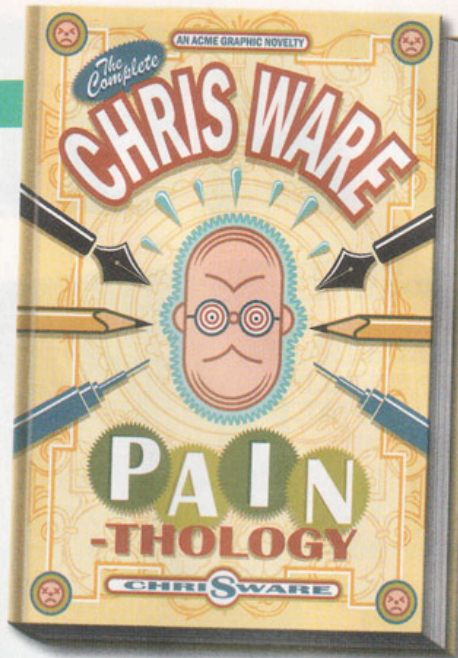
Next, his award-winning *Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth*. Corrigan is a friendless, awkward 12-year-old dreamer who hides from bullies and seeks refuge in superhero fantasies. It's a character type that comic book readers aren't used to seeing in their fiction. In their mirrors, yes, but not in their fiction. Much of the story is set in the late 19th century, a purer time without indoor plumbing. It's sure to strike a deep chord of nostalgia in anyone over the age of 110.

We follow Jimmy as he progresses from sitting at his kitchen table to sitting at his school desk to sitting in a hospital waiting room. Fans of plastic stacking chairs, this is the book for you! Corrigan ages from a beleaguered young boy to a feeble old man, although the story moves about 7% quicker than the real-life aging process. It's the quiet moments that register. Watching the reflected tint on a napkin dispenser change color slightly speaks more about inner torment than mere dialogue ever could, let alone plot development, or forward motion of any kind. In a bravura six-page sequence, Jimmy turns a doorknob.

The book ends on an upbeat note, as the dying protagonist remembers the one act of true kindness he ever knew: the time a stranger picked up Jimmy's leg after it had been severed by a trolley.

Realizing the untapped dramatic tension found in door jambs, Ware then fleshed out the first grueling 185 chapters of his work-in-progress, *Building Stories*. The story of a front stoop incrementally eroding, its remorseless drumbeat of hopeless sorrow and water-torture pacing made it the perfect choice to kick off the *New York Times*' aptly-named "Funny Pages".

The last section of the book showcases the bleak non-adventures of Rusty Brown, a snivelling, comic-collecting misfit. He's the type of pitiful fanboy who's destined to meet a cowardly end: self-suffocated, his head still in near-mint condition inside a decay-resistant Mylar storage bag.



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