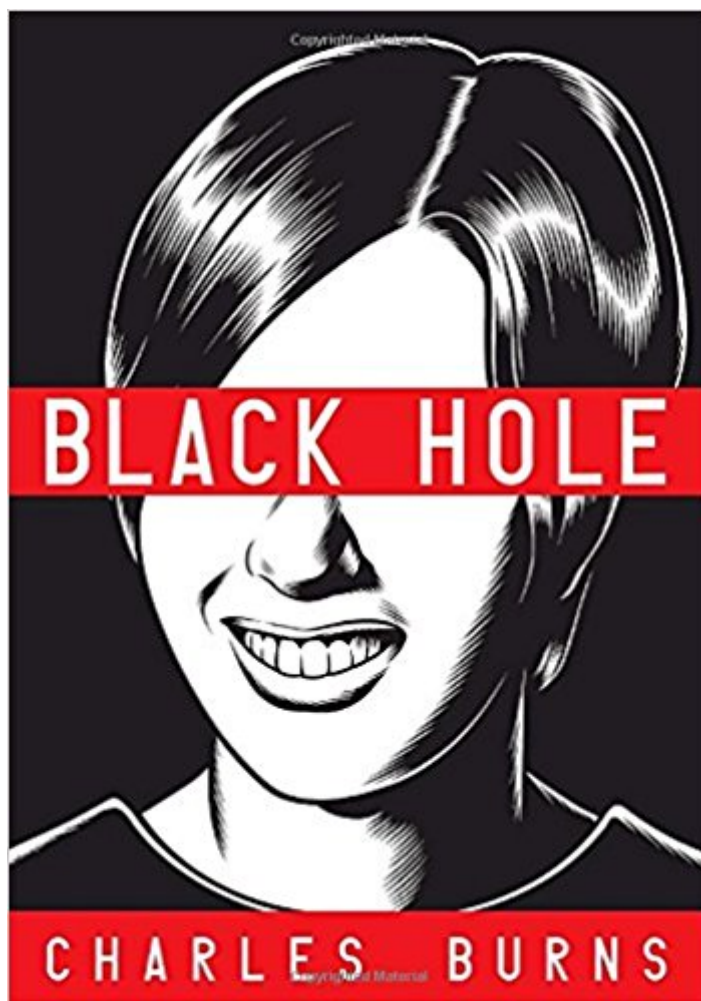


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Black Hole (Pantheon Graphic Novels)



Synopsis

Winner of the Eisner, Harvey, and Ignatz Awards
The setting: suburban Seattle, the mid-1970s. We learn from the outset that a strange plague has descended upon the area—its teenagers, transmitted by sexual contact. The disease is manifested in any number of ways —from the hideously grotesque to the subtle (and concealable) —but once you’ve got it, that’s it. There’s no turning back. As we inhabit the heads of several key characters —some kids who have it, some who don’t, some who are about to get it —what unfolds isn’t the expected battle to fight the plague, or bring heightened awareness to it, or even to treat it. What we become witness to instead is a fascinating and eerie portrait of the nature of high school alienation itself —the savagery, the cruelty, the relentless anxiety and ennui, the longing for escape. And then the murders start. As hypnotically beautiful as it is horrifying, *Black Hole* transcends its genre by deftly exploring a specific American cultural moment in flux and the kids who are caught in it—back when it wasn’t exactly cool to be a hippie anymore, but Bowie was still just a little too weird. To say nothing of sprouting horns and molting your skin.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The first issues of Charles Burns’s comics series *Black Hole* began appearing in 1995, and long before it was completed a decade later, readers and fellow artists were speaking of it in tones of awe and comparing it to recent classics of the form like Chris Ware’s *Jimmy Corrigan* and Daniel

Clowes's *Ghost World*. Burns is the sort of meticulous, uncompromising artist whom other artists speak of with envy and reverence, and we asked Ware and Clowes to comment on their admiration for *Black Hole*:

"I think I probably learned the most about clarity, composition, and efficiency from looking at Charles's pages spread out on my drawing table than from anyone's; his was always at the level of lucidity of *Nancy*, but with this odd, metallic tinge to it that left you feeling very unsettled, especially if you were an aspiring cartoonist, because it was clear you'd never be half as good as he was. There's an almost metaphysical intensity to his pinprick-like inkle that catches you somewhere in the back of the throat, a paper-thin blade of a fine jeweler's saw tracing the outline of these thick, clay-like human figures that somehow seem to "move," but are also inevitably oddly frozen in eternal, awkward poses ... it's an unlikely combination of feelings, and it all adds up to something unmistakably his own. "I must have been one of the first customers to arrive at the comic shop when I heard the first issue of *Black Hole* was out 10 years ago, and my excitement didn't change over the years as he completed it. I don't think I've ever read anything that better captures the details, feelings, anxieties, smells, and cringing horror of my own teenage years better than *Black Hole*, and I'm 15 years younger than Charles is. *Black Hole* is so redolently affecting one almost has to put the book down for air every once in a while. By the book's end, one ends up feeling so deeply for the main character it's all one can do not to turn the book over and start reading again." --Chris Ware

"Charles Burns is one of the greats of modern comics. His comics are beautiful on so many levels. Somehow he has managed to capture the essential electricity of comic-book pop-art iconography, dragging it from the clutches of Fine Art back to the service of his perfect, precise-but-elusive narratives in a way that is both universal in its instant appeal and deeply personal." --Dan Clowes

Questions for Charles Burns .com: Cartoonists are about the only people today who are working like Dickens did: writing serials that appear piece-by-piece in public before the whole work is done. What's it like to work in public like that, and for as long as a project like this takes? Charles Burns: There were a number of reasons for serializing *Black Hole*. First of all, I wanted to put out a traditional comic book-- I'd never really worked in that comic pamphlet format before and liked the idea of developing a long story in installments. There's something very satisfying to me about a comic book as an object and I enjoyed using that format to slowly build my story. Serializing the story also allowed me to focus on shorter, more manageable portions; if I had to face creating a 368-page book all in one big lump, I don't know if I'd have the perseverance and energy to pull it off. .com: One thing that stuns me about this book is how consistent it is from start to finish. From the first frames to the last ones that you drew 10 years later, you held the same tone and style. It feels as though you had a complete vision for the book from the very beginning. Is

that so? Or did things develop unexpectedly as you worked on it? Burns: I guess there's a consistency in *Black Hole* because of the way I work. I write and draw very slowly, always carefully examining every little detail to make sure it all fits together the way I want it to. When I started the story, I had it all charted out as far as the basic structure goes, but what made working on it interesting was finding new ways of telling the story that hadn't occurred to me. .com: Some of the very best of the recent graphic novels (I'm thinking of *Ghost World* and *Blankets*, along with *Black Hole*) have been about the lives of teenagers. Do you think there's something about the form that helps to tell those stories so well? Burns: That's an interesting question, but I don't know the answer. Perhaps it has more to do with the authors--the kind of people who stay indoors for hours on end in total solitude working away on their heartfelt stories... maybe that kind of reflection lends itself to being able to capture the intensity of adolescence. .com: In the time you've been working on *Black Hole*, graphic novels have leapt into the mainstream. (I think--I hope--we're finally seeing the last of those "They're not just for kids anymore!" reviews.) What did you imagine for this project when you started it? What's it been like to see your corner of the world enter the glare of the spotlight? Burns: When I started *Black Hole* I really just wanted to tell a long, well-written story. The themes and ideas that run throughout the book had been turning around in my head for years and I wanted to finally get them all out--put them down on paper once and for all. I've published a few other books and while they sold reasonably well, they didn't set the publishing world on fire. I was pretty sure I'd have some kind of an audience for *Black Hole*, but that was never a motivating factor in writing the book. And my corner of the world is still pretty dark. I guess I'll be stepping into the spotlight for a little while when the book comes out, but I imagine I'll slip back into my dark little studio when it all settles down again so I can settle back into work. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Starred Review. The prodigiously talented Burns hit the comics scene in the '80s via *Raw* magazine, wielding razor-sharp, ironic-retro graphics. Over the years his work has developed a horrific subtext perpetually lurking beneath the mundane suburban surface. In the dense, unnerving *Black Hole*, Burns combines realism--never a concern for him before--and an almost convulsive surrealism. The setting is Seattle during the early '70s. A sexually transmitted disease, the "bug," is spreading among teenagers. Those who get it develop bizarre mutations--sometimes subtle, like a tiny mouth at the base of one boy's neck, and sometimes obvious and grotesque. The most visibly deformed victims end up living as homeless campers in the woods, venturing into the streets only when they have to, shunned by normal

society. The story follows two teens, Keith and Chris, as they get the bug. Their dreams and hallucinations—made of deeply disturbing symbolism merging sexuality and sickness—are a key part of the tale. The AIDS metaphor is obvious, but the bug also amplifies already existing teen emotions and the wrenching changes of puberty. Burns's art is inhumanly precise, and he makes ordinary scenes as creepy as his nightmare visions of a world where intimacy means a life worse than death. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I read Black Hole for my graphic novel class. I had never heard of, and had no idea what to expect. Although it doesn't have page numbers, Goodreads says it is 352 pages long. It felt a lot shorter than that, as it moved extremely quickly. I finished it in two sittings. However, the content makes it seem longer -- this was a strange book. Black Hole I honestly got confused with this plot, which isn't something I can say about a lot of novels. This may have been, in part, because of the fact that two male characters (and even the main female character) all looked alike -- they all had black shoulder length hair with short bangs. I plan to go back through, and reread the novel again knowing that the two guys, Keith and Rob, are not the same person. Now this may have been a hard mistake to make for some, but it made things a little confusing at first for me. I believe the basic plot takes place in the 70s and is structured around Rob and Chris, who have a rocky start to a relationship, and their various friends. The other possible main character is Keith, who I figured out was a separate person from Rob about halfway in... All these people are somehow dealing with a type of 'bug' or disease that is being spread through sexual contact/saliva that physically disfigures people in strange ways (facial restructuring, growing new body parts -- Rob's second mouth, for example). This was really odd, and not well explained, but interesting all the same. This disease is incurable, and makes people social outcasts. Many who have it resort to living in the woods, stealing food to get by, and avoiding normal society. One thing that really struck me about this book was, unsurprisingly, the artwork. Partially because the characters do drugs quite a bit, and also partially due to the weirdness of their world, the artwork was beautiful and mind-opening, and just absolutely wonderful in every way. I know it sounds like I'm fawning over the art -- probably because I am. One character does artwork throughout the book, and you get to see some of it, and even that is wonderful in a weird, disturbing way. I spent much longer taking in the details of the strange layout (when Rob is tripping on LSD) than looking at the words that just described what he was seeing. The panels start to get wavy, start to weave into one another, and start to change shape when

things get trippy -- I feel this was a fantastic way to help the reader know what the characters were experiencing. If you don't have an open mind about drugs, sex, and horrible teenage actions, I would warn you away from this book. However, if you are open to that sort of thing, I would highly recommend it. Even the 'sexual' drawings, shoot, even the art from the pornographic magazines, didn't feel out of place or negative. It all fit in so well with the content of the story, that I think it really worked. The only downside (if I can even call it that) is the confusing plot. I think on a second read, everything will clear up a bit. Though I know some of it won't -- that's part of the mystery of the book; the full spreads of black pages with a few white, spiraling objects makes you question the story, the characters, and their motives. Overall, I really enjoyed this book, and definitely plan to reread it soon.

This is a very clever idea for a book: a new STD appears among a group of teenagers. This particular STD causes the body to be "disfigured" in unpredictable and grotesque ways. A kid might grow a tail, or an extra mouth, or webbed fingers... It quickly makes these young people outcasts, who have to try to figure out what to do with themselves. Some try to hide their differences and fit in while others take to the woods and live on their own. The artwork here is also very good. The story is told in black and white but much heavier on the black than the white. Some pages seem almost completely awash in ink with only pinpricks and slashes of white showing through to create the images. It is beautiful and eerie, completely appropriate to the story. If there is a weakness here it is that the story doesn't quite live up to the set-up and the art. The plot builds only very gradually and the pay-off isn't really worth the time invested in getting to it. It felt like Mr. Burns got a bit weary, and ended things quickly with a cliché-ridden bow. Still, for the most part, there's a lot to enjoy.

There is something I feel like I need to put out there so that potential buyers know what they're buying. This is a dark, sci-fi comic about kids coming of age. That is exactly what it is. Like all other stories using the coming of age archetype there are ups and downs, failed starts and missed connections. Maybe you heard that this is a comic about an STD called The Bug which mutates those that contract it and think that it will be some sci-fi thriller more akin to *The Fly* rather than say... *The Breakfast Club*. While that comparison may be a tad harsh, I think it's true. You have a smattering of teens from various backgrounds and it follows them as they learn to deal with the prejudices against them and how they will get by in this new life. Do not get me wrong, this is still a great read and I have gladly reread it a few times, but I was definitely expecting something else going into it. The characters are memorable and the struggles are comparable to those that any teen

goes through: self-discovery, the future vs the now, who can you trust and who are your real friends, what it means to love... These are all tropes that we're familiar with but with a new angle. The Bug is only a catalyst for the events in the book, and although I would have liked to know more about it and where it came from, that does not make the story any worse for wear. That being said, I felt that something was missing. Maybe I would have liked it more if the story wasn't set so fiercely on this handful of teens. I would have liked to see what the parents were doing and how they felt. I wanted to know why some characters were stalwart loners while others were paranoid clingers. Regardless, I would recommend this book easily, I would just make sure to stress that this is not a story about The Bug, but rather about kids with The Bug.

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