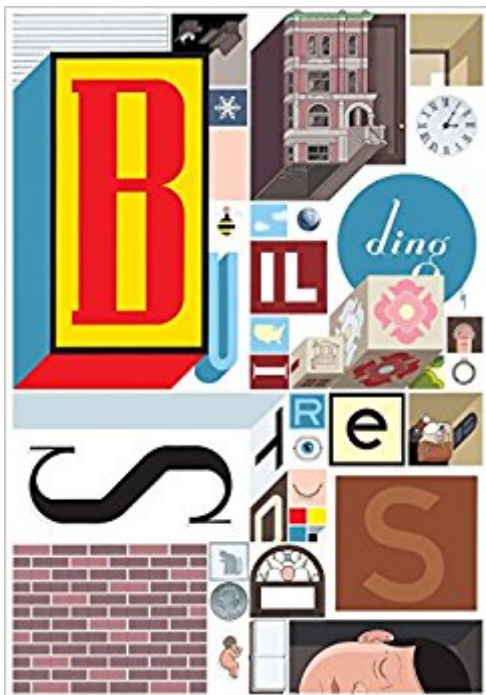


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Building Stories (Pantheon Graphic Novels)



Synopsis

The New York Times Book Review, Top 10 Book of the Year
Time Magazine, Top Ten Fiction Book of the Year
Publishers Weekly, Best Book of the Year
2013 Lynd Ward Prize, Best Graphic Novel of the Year
4-time 2013 Eisner Award Winner, including Best Publication, Best Writer/Artist and Best Graphic Album
Newsday, Top 10 Books of 2012
Entertainment Weekly, Gift Guide, A+
Washington Post, Top 10 Graphic Novels of 2012
Minneapolis Star Tribune, Best Books of the Year
Cleveland Plain Dealer, Top 10 Fiction Books of the Year, Best Books of the Year/Comics
Boing Boing, Best Graphic Novel of the Year
Time Out New York, Best of 2012
Entertainment Weekly, Best Fiction of 2012
Everything you need to read the new graphic novel Building Stories: 14 distinctively discrete Books, Booklets, Magazines, Newspapers, and Pamphlets. With the increasing electronic incorporation of existence, sometimes it's reassuring – perhaps even necessary – to have something to hold on to. Thus within this colorful keepsake box the purchaser will find a fully-apportioned variety of reading material ready to address virtually any imaginable artistic or poetic taste, from the corrosive sarcasm of youth to the sickening earnestness of maturity – while discovering a protagonist wondering if she'll ever move from the rented close quarters of lonely young adulthood to the mortgaged expanse of love and marriage. Whether you're feeling alone by yourself or alone with someone else, this book is sure to sympathize with the crushing sense of life wasted, opportunities missed and creative dreams dashed which afflict the middle- and upper-class literary public (and which can return to them in somewhat damaged form during REM sleep). A pictographic listing of all 14 items (260 pages total) appears on the back, with suggestions made as to appropriate places to set down, forget or completely lose any number of its contents within the walls of an average well-appointed home. As seen in the pages of The New Yorker, The New York Times and McSweeney's Quarterly Concern, Building Stories collects a decade's worth of work, with dozens of "never-before-published" pages (i.e., those deemed too obtuse, filthy or just plain incoherent to offer to a respectable periodical).

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Featured Pages from Building Stories (Click on images to enlarge)

Starred Review Ware has been consistently pushing the boundaries for what the comics format can look like and accomplish as a storytelling medium. Here he does away with the book format—*a thing between two covers that has a story that begins and ends*—entirely in favor of a huge box containing 14 differently sized, formatted, and bound pieces: books, pamphlets, broadsheets, scraps, and even a unfoldable board that would be at home in a Monopoly box. The pieces, some previously published in various places and others new for this set, swarm around a Chicago three-flat occupied by an elderly landlady, a spiteful married couple, and a lonely amputee (there's also a bee bumbling around in a rare display of levity). The emotional tenor remains as soul-crushing and painfully insightful as any of Ware's work, but it's really insufficient to talk about what happens in anything he does. It's all about the grind and folly of everyday life but presented in an exhilarating fashion, each composition an obsessively perfect alignment of line, shape, color, and perspective. More than anything, though, this graphic novel (if it can even be called that) mimics the kaleidoscopic nature of memory itself—fleeting, contradictory, anchored to a few significant moments, and a heavier burden by the day. In terms of pure artistic innovation, Ware is in a stratosphere all his own. --Ian Chipman

I have been looking forward to Chris Ware's newest installation for a while--ever since I picked up Jimmy Corrigan years ago. I've followed his Acme Novelty Library series, as well as newspaper/magazine publications when I could catch them. All these bits and pieces of Ware's work only increased my anticipation of his next long book. Building Stories is what I had wanted, and so, so much more. I will attempt to refrain from hyperbole in this review, but if you've seen or read Building Stories, you already know that it's not quite possible. What originally captivated me

about Ware's work were his almost obsessive attention to detail, beautiful and precise artwork that didn't look too 'cartoonish' (whatever that means), and the digressions from the main storyline (frequently in the form of cut-outs and paper dolls, which from what I understand are actually accurate and do function as described--such as the stereoscope and 'library' bookshelf; though, I could never, ever bring myself to cut up a book, let alone one of Ware's). I can't say that I have a great grasp of Ware's work in the context of other graphic novels, as I have never been a particularly avid reader of the genre; however, this attests to the ability of Ware's work to cross these well-established (and often dismissed) boundaries. To simply call *Building Stories* a graphic novel, a book, a novel, a comic, or really any one genre would be a great injustice that ignores what I believe a currently unparalleled form. A reader does not have to consider him or herself a fan of any of a particular genre to enjoy *Building Stories*; it is the story of memory, loss, trauma, and how these manifest themselves in everyday life that should draw readers into its pages. I would even say that this stands up to any work of literature, regardless of form or genre. It's first striking how large the box is. Immediately, it gave me an impression of its heft (both in weight and in accomplishment). Opening it is truly like being granted a secret passage into the minds and memories of the characters, and the non-linear format of the various 'pieces' mimics how both we and the characters access those memories. The first piece I read was a hardcover book that instantly took me back to my childhood, as it's reminiscent of the pressed-cardboard children's books that had a gold spine, and an inside cover with ornate illustrations of the publisher's popular characters with a space to write your name. I can't remember the publisher, but I know I had many books like this. This is exactly what makes Ware and *Building Stories* so outstanding: their ability to skillfully draw out an emotion from the reader that parallels the storyline. It does not feel like a cheap ploy of meta-fiction, which can be a danger of 'postmodern' fiction, but that the details are all so understated and do not scream, 'hey, look at me! Aren't I so clever?' helps bring a level of sincerity and genuine connection to the whole experience. With something that could easily wander into pretension, it never seems to cross that line (however, I now must admit it seems near impossible to write a review on it without taking on this air of pretension that Ware successfully avoids, haha). I spent several years living in Chicago, so the building and landscapes are excitingly familiar--I have a special, personal attachment to the building of *Building Stories* that I relish while reading. But really, it doesn't matter where I've lived; as long as I (or any reader) have lived a life with love, loss, regret, loneliness and varying degrees of human interaction, *Building Stories* will be a work that resonates in and even echoes the hopes, dreams, fears, and banality of a life at once both extraordinary and mundane.

Like all of Chris Ware's stories they are meticulously crafted visual tales that really hammer home the desperation and solitude of every day lives. The art is so flawlessly precise you'd think it was mechanically generated. The stories are slow, abstract and open to interpretation in many ways but mostly they reflect the poignancy of the solemnness of everyday life. This particular collection presents a myriad of tales revolving around several characters that live in the same apartment building but each aspect of their individual stories are presented in different formats within a beautifully designed box. You might find a portion of the larger story told within the format of a children's book designed like a classic GOLDEN BOOK for example. You can read each snippet in any order you want and digest the individual tales without a predefined structure, literally "BUILDING STORIES"

I got this book right when it was published, based on early reviews. I don't read graphic novels usually and I just love reading books on my Kindles-- but this book intrigued me. The box is as big as a Monopoly game box. It's interesting inside and out. I started looking at the items in the order kind of suggested on the back of the box. Some of the writing is small but I didn't let that stop me from enjoying it. I have a magnifying glass closeby to use which sounds annoying but I really find adds to my enjoyment. I usually rip through books and magazines but I found myself enjoying taking my time with these characters. I like getting to know them slowly just like you do with people in real life. I don't have time to read from this every day so I have a lot more material to read through. The only improvement for me would be to find others reading it too and have an online bookclub/discussion of this wonderful collection.

I'll first mention that my experience with graphic novels is extremely limited. (I've read all of "The Walking Dead" novels, and I just finished the first "Game of Thrones" graphic novel.) So, I'm perhaps not the ideal target audience for a work of art such as this, but when I read so many glowing pre-publication reviews last week, I was immensely intrigued. The \$30 price was, honestly, a bit daunting, but holding this collection in my hands, it feels like a bargain. There are fourteen distinct "pieces" in the collection - books, pamphlets, comics, etc. 's description notes there are 260 pages in total. Be sure to look at the group of six photos near the middle of the product page to get a feel for the items that are included, although the photos do not do this work justice. The pieces can be read in any order, and in fact, that randomness will impact every reader uniquely. "Building Stories" examines the lives of four people (and one bee!) living in a three-level Chicago apartment building. The stories flash back and forth in time, and the primary focus is on a single female tenant.

The title can be taken quite literally, as in life stories that occur in a building. Of course, a more apt interpretation is the idea that people are "built" by a series of sometimes seemingly mundane (or not so mundane) events, as captured in this collection. I read today that Ware spent ten years working on "Building Stories." I'm not surprised, as his dedication and passion shine through on every beautiful page.

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