

It's a very good time to be a graphic novel fan. Graphic fiction and non-fiction have become really hot properties, thanks, in part, to growing interest on the part of Hollywood. This year alone we have the last chapter of the "Dark Knight" trilogy, a new take on the Spider-Man franchise, a *Ghost Rider* sequel, and the gathering of several of Marvel's biggest properties in the epic *Avengers*. There's also the runaway hit *Walking Dead* on AMC.

With all the attention graphic novels are getting, it can still be a little intimidating to find a good place to jump in, particularly if super heroics and spandex tights aren't really your thing. Thankfully, the Cambridge Public Library has a wide assortment of graphic novels of all types to get you started. All of the following are self contained works—no ongoing series or multi-volume works here!

[*Mister X*](#) – Welcome to Radiant City, the city of the future. A city where the very architecture is slowly driving the population mad. Meet Mister X, the designer responsible. A blend of film noir, German expressionism, and art deco, *Mister X* follows the eponymous character as he tries to amend for his mistakes and save the citizens of Radiant City from madness. Fans of films like *Brazil*, *Dark City*, etc. will find a lot to love here in Dean Motter's masterpiece.

[*Blankets*](#) – *Blankets* is the autobiographic work of Craig Thompson, and explores his life growing up in a religious family in the rural Mid-West. From his troubled relationship with his parents, to the budding romance with a girl he meets over the summer, to the sometimes rivalry he has with his brother, Thompson tells his coming of age story beautifully in both word and image. Thompson's story is full of ups and downs, but even when he's going through hard times, the story never strays into cynicism.

[*Black Holes*](#) – In Seattle, in the 1970s, a group of teens find themselves dealing with the spread of a strange disease that causes bizarre mutations in sufferers. Charles Burns' novel follows four such teens as they struggle to cope with a disease that marks them as outsiders. Part horror, part coming of age story, Burns' mutation-as-STD metaphor is as tragic and moving as it is disturbing.

[*Fun Home*](#) – Alison Bechdel calls this memoir a "Family Tragicomic." Following the death of her father, Bechdel tries to come to terms with the complicated life that he lived, and how it shaped her own. Bechdel's autobiography deals frankly with the struggles she had with her own sexuality, her discovery of her father's closeted homosexuality, her fears about coming out to her family, and the difficult relationship she had with a father who seemed, at times, to be such a mystery.

[*Anya's Ghost*](#) – Anya isn't very happy with the way her life has been going—the daughter of Russian immigrants, she struggles to integrate into her new culture by distancing herself from the old. She doesn't have many friends, and she isn't comfortable with her own body. Then she meets the ghost, and things get even more complicated. Author/artist Vera Brosgol's debut is a wonderful look at the difficult and complicated life of a teenage girl. For a slightly different take on the "teenage girl meets a ghost" story, check out the equally great [*Friends With Boys*](#).

[*The Nobody*](#) – Jeff Lemire looks at small town life by taking the familiar elements of *The Invisible Man* and shifting the action to a modern small town. As Griffen tries to find a cure for his peculiar "condition," his eccentric behavior leads the curious residents of Large Mouth to view him with interest and growing suspicion.

[*Johnny Hiro*](#) – Johnny and his girlfriend Mayumi live in Brooklyn. Johnny's wants in life are few—rent money and time to spend with the love of his life. While money is tight, the young lovers have each

other and the support of their families, and that's enough, until one night, when a giant monster knocks a hole in their apartment wall and grabs Mayumi. From there, Johnny's life follows an absurd, but thrilling (and hilarious) new trajectory. Fred Chao's book is a delightful and charming and, yes, a little bit ridiculous.

[*I Kill Giants*](#) – In this quirky and poignant graphic novel, 5th grader Barbara Thorson spends her days battling giants... or, at least, that's what she tells her teachers and fellow students. The lines between escapist fantasy and harsh reality blur for Barbara as she faces metaphorical giants and the very real problems in her life. Through it all, Barbara's plucky attitude and quick wit constantly get her in and out of trouble, and entertain and amuse the reader. Joe Kelly and JM Ken Niimura have crafted a beautiful and touching story and a protagonist you won't forget.

[*Joe the Barbarian*](#) – In this fantasy epic by Grant Morrison and Sean Murphy, Joe—an 11 year old with Type 1 Diabetes—finds himself suffering from hypoglycemic shock, and entering a bizarre dream-world populated by figures from his childhood toys and games. As his blood sugar continues to drop, Joe struggles to determine his role as “the Dying Boy”—the savior the residents of this dream world have been waiting for—while trying to reach the kitchen so he can restore his blood sugar to normal. In less deft hands, this could easily have run off the rails, but Morrison and Murphy keep everything moving smoothly and bring genuine emotion to the story.